

CHERRY

BY BOOTH TARKINGTON

CHAPTER I.

MR. SUDGEBERRY.

ACROSS the most vital precincts of the mind a flippant sprite of memory will sometimes skip, to the dismay of all philosophy. So it was with me no longer ago than last night; as I sat writing a treatise upon a subject worthy of the profoundest concentration, there suddenly fluttered before my mental eye some cherry-colored ribbons; and, quite inexplicably, at the same time, it became clear to me that the most charming morning of my life was that sunshiny one in 1762 when Miss Sylvia Gray and I went walking.

There may be those who will declare that an aging, unmarried person would do better to get forward with his treatise than to waste the treasure of his talent upon a narrative of the follies of youth; but this I refute. The flicker of cherry color having caused my pen to wander and me to have dreams all night—I never dream—I seek relief in setting down the bewildering circumstances connected with the ribbons. For I have found by many experiences that setting down a thing lightens the burden of it, as a full-worded person must be bled of his words, or they coagulate within him and choke the veins of his mind, a condition which, in my younger days, was often like to bring me to the very italics of suffering.

Very early on the sunshiny morning to which allusion has been made, I found Miss Sylvia waiting at her gate to take the walk she had promised me. It was then, even before we set out, that I noticed the ribbons she wore that day. The fact that I remember a detail of this insignificance so great a number of years after is the more uncommon because at the time I do not think I particularly noticed the ribbons, my mind being occupied with considerations of the lady's mental and moral attributes. However,

it may not be gainsaid that this twinkling of bright colors seemed most befitting her appearance.

I had arrived at my father's house in the country but two days before, repairing thither upon finishing my third year of study at Nassau Hall, and I had proceeded at once to renew my pleasing acquaintance with Miss Gray, an acquaintance begun in childhood on account of our parents being neighbors, and continued later because of a feeling of growing admiration and reciprocal regard, clearly apparent, I think, between the maiden and myself. There was another lady of the neighborhood, Miss Amelia Robbins, who attracted me somewhat by the grateful and appreciative manner in which she received my attentions, but at the time of which I speak my greater pleasure was in Miss Sylvia's company—I may put it: my infinitely greater pleasure.

In candor I feel that I am justified in stating that certain qualities I was admitted to possess must have appealed to her liking, a something thoughtful and philosophic, a leaning towards theologic earnestness, and a contempt for the gayeties of the world, mingled with a particular cautiousness and a nice severity of habit; which attributes, I think it must be confessed, are uncommon in a youth of nineteen. In addition, my achievements in the classics and mathematics under Dr. Finley must have excited in her the warmest feelings of respect, such attainments being out of the reach of women. It may be that some will say I claim much for my character at that period of my career, but it is not I who make the claim. I had the heartiest assurance of my mother and others of my family that these things were so, and, as they have always shown themselves to be persons of great judgment and verity, I have accepted their opinion, and now write it down, hoping that, if there

be any immodesty in my so doing, it is attributable to them.

In regard to my feeling for Miss Gray, I have never leaned to outward appearance as a test of true worth, yet I will not attempt to deny that I found some attraction in the lady's uncommon likeliness of face and form, and in the gracefulness of her bearing. What occupied my graver consideration, however, was the fact that, although at times she exhibited a taste for frivolity which disturbed me somewhat, I believed her, underneath, to be of an exceedingly serious character; she at all times manifested a ready sympathy with a mind investigating the deeper things of life; she had a quick perception of the beauties of the classics—when translated and pointed out to her—and a suddenness of clear perception concerning the foibles of some partisans who advocate pernicious liberality in divers questions—when the two sides of the debate had been explained to her. I have remarked the same quality in all the agreeable women I have ever known. Miss Amelia Robbins is an almost perfect example of it.

But I digress from the sunshiny morning. After greeting me as I joined her, "Where shall we go?" cried Miss Gray.

"Miss Sylvia," I replied, as she descended the steps from the gate, "it matters little whither we betake ourselves this morning, for—"

"Why?" she interrupted, at the same time casting down her eyes and speaking in a low voice. I remember thinking her manner strange, and it still seems so to me. There were many incomprehensible things about this young lady, as will be luminously set forth ere the conclusion of my narrative.

"Because," I said, briskly, "to him who truly understands the art of conversation, time and place count for little."

"Then why should we walk at all?" she asked.

"Why, indeed?" said I, pausing; but she went straight on, quickening her steps instead of stopping; so, without more words, I followed.

"Shall we go to the brook, Mr. Sudgeberry?" she asked as we reached the lane. "Shall we cross the fields?" Not wait-

ing for my assent, she climbed the stile, and we set forth toward the brook. "How glorious it is to be stirring so early!" says she, presently. "See the dew shining on the cobwebs in the grass, and listen to the birds in the grove. La! I could dance for the very gayety of it!" And she began to sing a little song.

It had ever been my custom to reply to such outbursts of Miss Gray's with some thoughtful sentiment, delivered in a serious tone, as tending to check (or moderate) the ebullencies of her disposition, so I answered, walking the while with quiet dignity:

"How often do we unthinkingly pass by lessons which humble nature sets forth for our improvement! Here in the lowly cobweb we see an allegory, if we be not too heedless. What lesson do you obtain from it, Miss Gray?"

My purpose was effected at once, for the song, which was an idle one, with no moral to it, ceased, and she became all interest and sympathy.

"What lesson, Mr. Sudgeberry?" she asked, gravely.

"Why," I answered, "the lesson of industry, of perseverance!"

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Sudgeberry; I see;—the spider's industry. How appropriate!"

I looked upon her approvingly, and continued: "See how laboriously he has builded himself a place of refuge and rest for his weary head, and a retreat where he may raise and shelter the young ones, and—"

"Surely," she interrupted, "I have read somewhere that the females do that."

Quite confounded for the moment, I walked on in silence, whereupon she began to sing again. Then, not because the sound of her voice was distasteful to me (although I have no great patience with music of any sort), but because I regarded the theme of the song as unworthy to occupy time which might be spent in profitable interchange of ideas, I began a modest dissertation upon the place allegory has occupied in history. "Oh," I concluded, "how easily it puts to shame the baser uses of fiction! How unworthy the time thrown away upon the study of poetry—except the classics—compared to that which is filled with

the reading of allegories, great moral truths tending ever to our improvement in diligence and learning, and conceived by the loftiest intellects for our advancement and profit!"

Our walk had fatigued Miss Gray, for at this moment she exclaimed, with an accent of relief: "How beautiful, Mr. Sudgeberry! Here we are at the brook," and sat down in the grass.

After ascertaining that the ground was not damp, the sun having by this time sucked up all the dew, I sat down beside her. We were upon a knoll which ran down to the little stream, and, shaded by a group of great trees, our position was not unpleasant. The spot was remote from the customary haunts of the youth of the neighborhood, a fact upon which I considered us both subject for felicitation, especially as there was an intolerably dull fellow, William Fentriss, who was everlastingly in attendance upon Miss Sylvia. Indeed, as he was forever lolling at or near the Grays' domicile, I had been under some apprehension that he might spy us as we crossed the fields and join us, forcing upon us his idle talk, which was never aught but the veriest nonsense, and utterly unintelligible to an intellect concerned with anything of weight or worth.

This impertinent, though never my companion, was my fellow-student at Nassau Hall, being one year beneath me; and in that I could treat him with the superiority I felt. He lavished those golden hours of youth in wanton idling, or profitless visiting with the liveliest young ladies of the surrounding country. I could not understand how he was tolerated by women of tone, refinement, and cultivation, being, as he was, always grossly overdressed to the extreme point of fashion; but even the most impeccable model of female manners and charm seemed, to my amazement, ever ready with a gracious smile when he came near.

It was impossible to comprehend how Miss Gray could find his conversation worth hearing, or how she could permit his continued presence near her; and I judged the present time to be appropriate for the venturing of a few remarks which might indicate, indirectly and delicately, her error, and at the same time point out the preferable merits of true worth

as subject for her esteem. I did not wish to make her very unhappy, yet I hoped for a few signs of contrition.

Therefore, after turning over the matter in my mind and thinking up with care the opening sentences, as well as the general trend of the conversation as it should be directed, I began as follows:

"Oh, how oft," said I—for I judged there could be no harm in a somewhat poetical phrase or two—"how oft in the lot of man does he encounter circumstances and things which leave him speechless with amazement, upon which there is no profit in pondering, and as a final dictum upon which there can be no other than, 'I do not understand'!"

"There can be no doubt of that," agreed Miss Gray, looking thoughtfully at the buckle of my shoe.

"Take, as an instance," I continued, "an anomaly furnished by human nature. How frequently do we see true merit neglected, or even despised, for the sake of those more gaudy attributes which lie but upon the surface! If it were given to me to consult an oracle—I have explained to you this usage of the ancients, I think—there is one question I would propound to it before any other, and that is: 'Why do ladies sometimes prefer the idle and superficial to those from whom they might derive lasting benefits of a serious and learned nature?' A spectacle I have sometimes observed, and which has astonished me beyond words, is that of young ladies, apparently sane and desirous of improvement, listening with seeming pleasure to the conversation of the light and sprightly, ay! to all appearances enjoying the society of mere men of fashion, who pour into their ears pernicious extravagancies, pitiful nonsensicalities, and flippant nothings, while deeply philosophical and pious youths who are incapable of lightness, and who would scorn to utter a word unfraught with earnest sobriety or profoundest learning, are allowed to remain unnoticed!"

Here, I judged, the tone of my expressions demanded more than ordinary address; so, with proper gravity and deliberation, I reached out to take her hand, which lay close to mine upon the grass; but, encountering a spider-nest in my progress towards it, the mother-spider

issued from the interior of her mansion and bit me on the thumb, which I was forced to place in my mouth in order to extract her poison. But I could see that my argument had not been without its effect upon Miss Sylvia, for she cast down her eyes and turned her face away.

"Ah, let us consider," I was beginning to continue, approaching my climax,—when we suffered an interruption of the most annoying description. From a group of trees on our right came the sounds of a guitar, strummed in preliminary chords, and then a man's voice, the airy, impertinent quality of which I was at no loss to recognize, though the singer was hidden from our sight, buzzed out the following ditty, and we were compelled to listen, willy-nilly:

"When Beauty wanders far from home
For a June-time ramble,
Then Cupid starts to ambush her
At a rapid amble.

"Sylvia, Sylvia, turn not away;
List to the words I'd be saying.
Sylvia, Sylvia, Love lurks all day
Where'er your feet go a-straying!

"No fancy could depict what charms
Always must surround her.
Till Cupid heralds them abroad
When he's caught and bound her.

"Sylvia, Sylvia, never berate!
List to the song I'd be sighing.
Sylvia, Sylvia, Love lies in wait,
Ever his nets for you trying."

"So!" I exclaimed, with great contempt, at the conclusion. "What vain pretension to elegance is disclosed in the imperfections of the last stanza! One does not 'sigh' a song, but sings it. 'Tis pulled in with a rope for the rhyme!"

At this moment William Fentriss stepped into view from behind the trunk of a great tree, and, the guitar swung over his shoulder by a silken ribbon, came towards us with the easy swagger and confident manner of which impudence is invariably master. Such cheerful insolence, combined with greater foppery of attire, mine eyes have never beheld.

"Nay, nay!" cries he. "A song to cruel Lady Sylvia must needs be sighed. Take my word, Mr. Sudgeberry, 'tis the only way to find half their favor. Sigh, sir, be humility itself, and you will win half of a lady's heart."

"And the other half, Mr. Fentriss?" smiled Miss Gray. I could not understand this smile, particularly after what I had said to her.

"Oh, for the other half, you'd best take a stick and beat her," he answered, laughing. "But, until you have won the first portion, constantly prostrate yourself at her feet." With that he deliberately flung himself on the ground within an inch of Miss Gray's shoes, and marvellous clumsy I thought he looked. "And sigh," says he. And he fetches a sigh! Never have I seen an uninvited person appear more invited. After a pause, "Such gayety, Mr. Sudgeberry!" says he.

At this I showed the scorn I felt by so stern and commanding a frown that he had surely been confounded and left in pitiable consternation, but Miss Gray intervened. "What a pretty day!" she instantly exclaimed.

"Indeed," I was replying, "it—" I achieved only so far when the impudent varlet took the words out of my mouth, as if the lady's remark had been addressed to him.

"A morning of the gods!" he cried. "A perfect day; a sweeter never dawned. Pearls and emeralds under foot and sapphire overhead—a jewel of a day! No wonder nymphs stroll abroad! I leave it to Mr. Sudgeberry if a woman is a woman on such a morning. The poorest of the sex becomes a divinity in these airs. And what does the fairest appear"—with a look at Miss Gray which methought must have near made her buffet him—"when the meanest of her sisters is so transfigured! Queen Titania herself, faith!"

"In that case, sir," I said, loftily, "she has small use for flatterers and idlers; queens, if they have been brought up properly, discovering early in life how to detect such gentry. Queens, sir," I repeated with dignity, "queens, having sober lessons to learn, far prefer employment in useful and improving conversations with persons of sense and breeding. Queen Titania, rest assured, would have small interest in the cheap figure of speech which would turn nature into a goldsmith's shop."

"No," said he; "you would have it that she is still in love with the gentleman with the ass's head!" And he burst into a mannerless guffaw.

Here Miss Gray rose in haste, and announced that she must be returning, as the sun would soon be too warm for pleasure on the homeward stroll. I marked with indignation that our unwelcome companion proposed to accompany us, and this purpose he had the effrontery to carry out; I walking in intense and bitter silence, he chattering as easily as though he had not thoroughly disgraced his bringing-up in a dozen ways, while he made such speeches to the lady as I thought must have undoubtedly called forth a chilling rebuke; but none came, to my sore regret.

When we reached her gate, Miss Sylvia turned and bade us good-morning, with a little nod to each. "Such a pleasant stroll you've given me!"

"Yes," I replied, "to the brook."

"Was it not?" said William. "I was but a little way behind you. The walk from the brook has been too warm for you, Mr. Sudgeberry? We must go again."

"We!" I exclaimed. "We!"

"Good-morning, gentlemen!" cried Miss Gray, and she ran into the house.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONFESSION OF LOVE.

THE events I have described may be accepted as a sample of what took place through the entire summer. Time and again, I would no sooner have Miss Gray's company to myself and begin the deduction of some truth for her benefit, or open an instructive conversation, than that graceless fellow would pop up and hurl his nonsensicalities upon us. Often, too, he succeeded in monopolizing her entirely, by drawing her away into obscure recesses, when I seldom failed to be thrown into the society of her father, a stout, dull old gentleman, with no more profit or capacity for improvement in him than a pulpy oyster.

Nothing could have been clearer than that Mr. Fentriss's attentions often annoyed Miss Sylvia, but he never would have believed it, so conceited is impudence, so secure in its own fastness. Even one well-merited rebuke which he had from her failed to shake him. Tossing up her head at some brazen love-making (he made love to her under my very

eyes), she turned pointedly to me, one evening, while I was endeavoring to converse with old Mr. Gray, and said: "Please talk to me in an improving way, Mr. Sudgeberry. Nay, Mr. Fentriss, I prefer listening to something profound. I'll hear no more of the speeches you make during the winter, and use again upon us poor home ladies in summer. Proceed, Mr. Sudgeberry; I am all ears. Let me have some great lesson, please."

I at once began a conversation on the decline and fall of the Persian Empire; to which she listened attentively, while I triumphantly watched my rival, looking to see him betray signs of defeat and shame. Had I suffered the public rebuke which he had so well merited and received, I should have hung my head and left the place, but he was without the power to perceive his own downfall.

Evening after evening, on repairing to Miss Gray's, I found him already there; always before me. This almost led me to suppose that Miss Sylvia might be in the habit of asking him to dine with her and her father, but I dismissed the suspicion as unworthy, with the conclusion that if he did dine with them he forced himself upon them, for he was capable of it.

Another thing to his discredit: while the mere fact of his preceding me in arrival at the Grays' should have dictated to him an early departure, he was so insensate that he always managed to remain until after I had left—and this, too, in spite of many a strong hint from both the young lady and myself, and also in spite of the fact that I staid there every night till I could fairly hold up my head no longer, and was forced to depart through sheer drowsiness at a time long after decent folk had gone to bed. I sometimes hinted at this in his presence; so did Miss Gray; and as for old Mr. Gray, he openly said it, along toward midnight. I have even known him to groan without disguise, and most piteously; but what effect did that have on William Fentriss? None in the wide world! So impervious was he that he would brazenly reply to the good old man with the mockery of a responsive sigh. No comment on such conduct is necessary.

Hour after hour would we sit, watching for each other to go, he ensconced

nearer Miss Sylvia—his art in accomplishing this feat was little short of magic—and I would have to converse with old Mr. Gray. I often raised my voice in order that the lady might have the benefit of my remarks, but at such times Fentriss would break into peals of laughter over some private witticism of his own (I made sure), and my effect would be lost.

Often I thought I should die of the effort of talking to that dull old man. When I would come to a climax in my discourse, and, striking the main question of a theme, thus, perhaps, putting it—"And what, then, *was* this all-pervading error of the ancients?"—I would give, of course, the proper rhetorical pause, intending to proceed at once; but invariably old Mr. Gray would appear to think I had finished the subject, and at once interject some such remark as, "The north field is looking very well for oats."

Will any intelligent mind require me to enlarge upon the mere statement that the introduction of such observations into the heart of a discussion leaves its logical continuance well-nigh impossible, and must ever be the occasion of acute distress to any earnest expounder?

Mr. Fentriss continued to take up so much of Miss Sylvia's time that I might have been disheartened and led to suspect it was by her connivance, except for some expressions of hers which fell to my knowledge by a happy chance. The evening before the occurrence I mention, I had made (to Mr. Gray) a long and able defence of infant damnation, tracing the creed and quoting many commentators with laborious exactitude. Now I would not have it thought that my efforts went always without result upon my constant listener. Nay, the influence I gradually came to exert over him is another proof to me that determined perseverance *cannot* go unrewarded. May I confess it was not without a degree of pleasure that, as time went on, I perceived my conversation producing, little by little, a stronger and stronger effect upon Miss Sylvia's father? I have known him to be so moved by my modest flights that, at the end, he would reply thickly, even (I may say) with a broken utterance. What suitor, let me ask, is not glad of a power obtained over the near

relatives of the admired one? and was not my pride pardonable for this achievement, which, as the sequel shows, I had performed entirely by means of my own unaided conversation? Therefore I will make no apology for recording my triumphs in this direction.

This evening Mr. Gray appeared somewhat restless during my argument, but the peroration fixed him in his chair as immovable as if I had pinned him to it with a knife. I felt that I had thoroughly convinced him, and was confirmed in this impression when he rose and explained, with a curious incoherency in his voice, that he must consult some of the authorities in his library; but he did not return, though I waited a considerable time.

The following afternoon I was riding along a quiet lane, with the reins on my horse's neck, and perusing a work of merit, when I perceived two mounted figures ahead of me, which I at once recognized as those of Miss Gray and her father. I clapped my book in my pocket, and quickened my nag's gait to overtake them, but, as I drew near, I perceived they had not noticed my approach, the dust being thick and muffling the hoofbeats, so I pulled in, meaning to come upon them unexpectedly and give them a pleasant surprise. Thus, by chance, I happened to overhear part of their conversation.

The old gentleman appeared to be excited, flinging his arms about in the most vigorous gestures. It was a warm afternoon, and that part of the back of his neck unprotected by his queue was quite purple.

"Saints and martyrs!" cries the profane old man. "I'll bear it no longer! I will not! Do you want to see your old father in a mad-house? For the sake of my white hairs tell that fool to go away and stay there!"

At this my heart beat high with happiness. "Aha!" thinks I, "my work has not gone in vain! Mr. Gray is on my side! Now, Master Will, I wish you had been here to hear her father's opinion of you!" I could see that Sylvia was amused.

"Stop your laughing!" the old gentleman bawled, violently. "It's no laughing matter. I've fallen off three stone this

summer, and I'd rather take the plague than go through it again! You've got to let me talk to Fentriss."

"So!" thought I, my respect for Mr. Gray greatly increased, "Master Will is not to bother me much longer. This good old man will send him about his business, a-humming."

"Why do you let him come?" the old man asked, angrily.

"To amuse you, father dear," responded the daughter, roguishly.

"Amuse *me*!" I feared Mr. Gray would burst his coat seams. "If you are going to have the other, why—"

Here, with joy, I saw the fair one bend her head in maiden modesty, and her voice fell so low I scarce could hear the words she said. Her posture, graceful and coy, bespoke a sudden shyness, as tender as it was, in her, unexpected—an attitude of revelation, which, I confess, caused a thrill, a warmth of satisfaction, to pass through my veins. I admit, additionally, that, for some inexplicable reason, both the thrill and the satisfaction were irrationally increased by the manner in which, as she began to blush exceedingly, the wave of her hair, falling from her brow, shone against the crimson of that brow and of her cheek.

She turned her downcast eyes away from her father, so that her profile was toward me; then she lifted her face and her glance, and spoke—to the air, it seemed. "You know—oh, do I need to say it?—there is only one in the whole world that I—" She paused.

But I would listen no more to a confession so much to my advantage, and therefore, coughing loudly, I gave my nag a flick and rode up beside them. Judge the pleasure of my feelings when I saw that my arrival threw the object of my affections into the most delightful confusion; while good Mr. Gray, in his surprise, welcomed me with broken monosyllables and cries of pleased amazement.

It only remained for me to choose when I should put the question. Secure in her father's approval, aware of my place in her own good graces, and knowing their joint condemnation of my rival, I only laughed in my sleeve, after this, when he would talk all evening to Miss Gray, leaving me to address myself diligently to her good father. At this period

I had fears that all was not well with Mr. Gray's constitution, and I believe that he was having business troubles, for he sometimes suffered spells of terrible depression; also, his complexion took on a sickly, pallid hue, unusual, and sinister in a full-blooded person.

Only one thing could have added to my triumph and the pleasure of it; and that very thing did not fail to take place. William Fentriss was thereby exhibited in his true character and left outside the pale of reputable company, and moreover, through an incident as happy for us as unfortuitous for him, utterly banished from Mr. Gray's and his daughter's society.

In the city a few miles distant there lived—if gyrating to the fiddles all night and snoring abed all day be living—a number of romping, Mohawkish youths who were friends of William Fentriss. One Saturday night—well I recall it! for it was the first evening of the summer he did not obtrude himself upon Miss Sylvia and me—Will repaired to town for a banquet given by these roisterers. Now, emerging from their feast, confused and elevated by the noxious fumes of their potations, the party rioted over the place till the watch was summoned; the young men were surrounded, and, in the state of enfeeblement which then befell them, easily captured and conveyed to the lock-up. Such exploits, vicious as they must be held, were commonly overlooked in those days; but our little community was, for the greater part, a proper, serious, disciplinarian one; and by noon the next day Will Fentriss was being held up as a warning example to every apple-thieving or anywise-depraved child of the neighborhood, for the story was immediately brought out to us and widely spread; and though there were found those impertinent enough to excuse the young man, alleging in defence his early departure from the banquet, before the acts of maraudery were committed, yet none could deny he had been of the party, or that the young men were his friends; and sentiment was strong against him.

There was one curious detail concerning his actions which I shall not overlook, but which has received more weight in the minds of many than its due; in-

deed, there have been people dull enough to use it as the basis of a completely laughable theory concerning Miss Gray's course in regard to William, a theory so far from being borne out by the facts that I need not more definitely mention it. The origin of this nonsense was the report that at the banquet, when the toasts to the ladies were called and William's turn came, he rose, and instead of crying, "I give you Sylvia!" as all expected, pronounced the word "Cherry!"

The very next morning there was a clacking about this which bade fair to outdo and smother the righteous indignation over Will's wildness and perpetrations; there was also vast curiosity and hopeful prying in regard to the identity of Miss Cherry, with much wondering how Sylvia Gray would take it. This, of course, was the very arrogance of misconception, as well I knew, since the day I rode up behind Mr. Gray and Miss Gray, that William Fentriss might toast a thousand Cherrys if he would, it was less than nothing to Sylvia.

It was about two of the afternoon, I think, when, as I sat studying beneath an apple-tree, near our front gate, I heard my name called—somewhat tremulously—from the road, and turning, beheld Miss Gray herself, upon her little gray mare. She impatiently awaited my approach, flicking her skirt with her whip and glancing up and down the road. I could not fail to perceive her very visible agitation, nor did I find the expression of her emotions unbecoming. Her eyes, now veiled as she followed the flickings of her whip-lash, now turning away from me, then toward me, but never directly meeting mine, were of a troubled brightness; her breath came quick; her face was overspread with a high color; her whole attitude betokened an excited determination.

"Saddle your horse, Mr. Sudgeberry," says she; "I want you to ride with me, if you please."

Then well I understood that flushing brow, that heaving bosom, that tumultuous yet decided glance! Having cognizance of the condition of her affections, here was no trying riddle to read. She was as modest and proper a maiden as breathed, and I knew she must have made a great struggle ere she allowed her-

self to come seeking a gentleman's society, instead of waiting at home for his invitations.

She looked over my head for a moment, with a great sweetness, and continued: "I was engaged to walk, at this hour, with Mr. Fentriss; but I prefer to ride with you—that is, if you—wish," she finished, faltering tenderly.

At this point I came near making a declaration of my purpose regarding her future; but I had already given this question a searching consideration, deciding not to speak until the Christmas holidays, and my wisdom now held me silent; for a betrothal, at the present time, entailing a reciprocal correspondence when I returned to Nassau Hall, would have interfered with my studies during the following term, which was the crucial one of the whole course, and had I not thus regulated my conduct with a stern hand, I might have lost the Latin prize, which was the climax of my career as a student.

I replied to Miss Sylvia's request cautiously, making reference to my scholarly tasks for the afternoon with a regretful glance at my books, as I judged it expedient in dealing with a woman to exhibit plainly the sacrifices made for her—yet at the same time I gave her to understand that I willingly fell in with her invitation, and in less than half an hour we were jogging side by side along the road, she leaning towards me from her saddle with the most blushing and flattering attention to my discourse. Never had a man a more perfect listener than I that afternoon. Her orbs of vision, exponents of the enrapt mind, were fixed upon the distance; in them dwelt a profound glow which gratified me exceedingly; and the people whom we met turned and stared after us as we went along. This also pleased me. But nothing touched me to such extreme delight that day as the first sight of Will Fentriss's face when he saw us coming up the road together.

CHAPTER III.

THE NOTE.

ONE fine evening near the close of the following week, Mr. Gray, Miss Sylvia, and I sat upon the porch in sympathetic converse, when whom should we behold walking towards us from the gate in

the clear moonlight but old Vawter Fentriss, Will's uncle and guardian! Vawter Fentriss was a loose, apple-cheeked old man, full of hoarse jests; a shame to his years. You could not pass his house any day in the summer but to see him, always dressed in a green coat and velvet cap, romping amongst his dogs, or mayhap seated on the rim of the horse-trough, smoking a long pipe, an admiring semicircle of stable-boys and farm-servants listening to Heaven knows what kind of tales from his undignified lips. He would exchange quips in loud shouts with every passer-by of his acquaintance, never leaving off as long as both remained in hearing; so that the sober-minded were forced to make long, painful détours to avoid his house. However, it was in no jesting humor that he came to-night; his heavy face was troubled and anxious, and often he kicked at some of the hounds that had followed him.

I observed Miss Sylvia's bearing with commendation and approval. She rose to greet the visitor, but held herself haughtily, and, returning Vawter's salutations with a proud bearing, showed him a chair by Mr. Gray.

"Nay," says he, "I'll not sit, thank you. I came on an errand to you, Miss Sylvia, and—" He paused, as though hoping she might offer to speak with him in private, but he was disappointed therein, for she, at once taking on an air of patient languor, only looked over his head.

At this he showed considerable discomfort, knowing not how to continue. "Well," he observed, presently, "it is a fine night. I just thought I would come by this way."

There was no reply, and after a silence of some duration he wiped his face several times with his kerchief, and repeated, in a low voice, "I just thought I would come by this way." Then he kicked his dogs down the steps, apologizing for their presence, as nothing could withhold them from following him wherever he went. This done, he stood muttering in a low voice that it was a fine night, until one of the dogs again obtruded himself upon the steps, whereat his master turned and booted him clean over another dog. This seemed of great help to Mr. Fentriss.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Am I to stand here like a frozen ninny and have even the manners of my own dogs disgrace me? Will you tell me," he continued, turning upon Mr. Gray with a suddenly choleric face, "what it is you have against my boy?"

"I!" exclaimed Mr. Gray. "What have I done against him?"

"Will's a good lad," cried Vawter; "as good and well-behaved as any living; yet here, because of a little gayety, and the granny-patter over it, you forbid him your house. What kind of neighborliness do you say that is?"

"I forbid him the house!" said the other. "I had nothing to do with it. I—"

"Why, it is common talk all over the place that he was forbidden to come here, that you disapproved his courses; that—"

"I tell you, sir," interrupted Mr. Gray, "I did not forbid him. I had noth—"

But Vawter, in his turn, took the words out of his neighbor's mouth. "Well, Heaven pardon you! Why, it's the common gossip, and Will himself could not deny it when I put it to him flat. 'Twas the very day after that supper-doings in town. Will was to walk with Miss Sylvia here; and she, instead of keeping her word with him, came slowly riding by with Sudgeberry just as poor Will came out of your gate, having found her away. There were others that saw it, Mr. Gray; I know whereof I speak. She took no notice of my nephew's bow, and would have passed him by, making much of Sudgeberry the while; but Will would not be so used, and ran in front of her horse. She bade him clear the path, and, upon his demanding an explanation, she told him bitterly that he had friends in town he'd best return to; that neither she nor you desired more of his company; he was too gay a gentleman, she said; and she gave him the message from you that he was forbid the house. Hey, sir, if that—"

"Now, now!" Mr. Gray cut in. "'Twas only at Sylvia's bidding. She had the tale that Will was in disgrace, and she desired my authority; it's true I sent the message, since she wished it, but—"

"Well, what d'ye call that?" said Vawter. "If that ain't forbidding a man your house!"

"'Tis easy to see," Mr. Gray observed,

plaintively, "that you have no daughter."

"But I have a nephew."

Mr. Gray lifted his hands in a feeble gesture of protest. "I give it up," he murmured. "I can't make head nor tail of it. What with the evenings I've had and the troubles I've been through this season, and losing sleep, and Sylvia's crying about the house all week, and neighbors quarrelling with me on account of her affairs, I doubt I last the summer."

"You may be troubled, sir," rejoined Vawter, "but so am I. I can't bear to see Will as he's been since Miss Sylvia has thrown him aside—and for Sudgeberry, here—for do it she did; yes, like an old moth-eaten cap! I can't bear to look at the lad, sitting all day in one place with his head in his hands, he that has all his life been the gayest of the gay, and made my widower's house cheery, and—" He coughed several times at this point, then spoke up sharply:

"Look, now! Don't think I come from him, or that he knows it! He's proud as you are, ma'am. 'Tis best I tell you that. But if you can't be kind to him again, I don't know what we are to do; not for the life o' me! I don't mean he will be doing anything wicked or desperate—he has his good sense, and much of it—but can't I say a word to turn you to him? He's thought the world and all of you, and dreamed of little else these five years. If it is as I hear, and you're angry with him for that toast to 'Cherry,' why, it may be that could be explained."

"Sir!"

Sylvia's voice was husky with indignation, and she lifted her head proudly. "He may toast as many 'Cherrys' as he pleases, so he does not come near me. His connection with the affair in town is my reason. What can it be to me whom he toasts? He is proud, is he? Well, sir, you may tell him that I am too proud myself to allow young men to be the associates of Mohawks and Heaven knows whom, in town, and then seek company in me! He will not sit with his head in his hands long; never you fear for that, sir! 'Twill be a mighty little time till he finds consolation in his 'Cherrys'; and *they* will not be too proud, you will see!—ladies with whose names he was free enough to mention before that company!

Proud! 'Tis my one satisfaction, tell him, that he *is*—or pretends to be—since it keeps him out of my sight!"

Now I ask all the world: What completer proof was ever offered that a woman cared nothing for a particular man than this speech of Sylvia's that Will Fentriss was not, and never had been, the weight of her little finger to her? Also, observe that Mr. Gray spoke of her weeping much of late. Ay, though I had not seen her weep, I knew she had been dismal enough; and so had I myself, at times; I confess it. The end of my holiday was fast approaching, and with it a separation of months was coming upon us. What wonder that I sighed sometimes; what wonder that she wept?

When she had said her say to Vawter, she turned haughtily and swept away to the other end of the porch, where she remained, lost in her reflections.

It seemed to me befitting and proper that a few words be hereupon addressed to Mr. Fentriss; advancing, therefore, to where he stood gasping with astonishment on the steps, I extended the first finger of my right hand toward him in dignified reproof, and exclaimed, "Oh, sir, fie!"

An expression of the most astounding and intolerable rage suddenly overspread his features.

"Well, upon my soul and vitals!" he burst forth. "If it's come to this, I'll—"

But I cut him off sharply and allowed him not one word more.

"Ay, sir!" I cried, loudly. "I repeat: Fie! Fie!—and be ashamed! Compose yourself to a more respectable frame of mind while I expound your own case for your benefit and good. Is it the part of Age to be the messenger of petulant Youth, justly rebuked and sulking?"

"I'll not stand this!" Vawter replied, in tones which alternated between hoarse remonstrance and apoplectic choking. "If I do, may I—"

I immediately asserted my human right to speech, conquering him by the force and, may I say, the majesty of will-power, which I possessed to as great a degree in my younger days as now. I poured forth upon him not the vials of contempt, but the silver decanters of eloquent instruction. I gave utterance to the wisdom of the ancients upon the proper courses for

aged men to follow, adding thereunto my own deductions, clearly demonstrating that the only path now open to him was a silent and contrite withdrawal. At first he waved his hands violently, and attempted to drown my words by his roarings; but these ran into a dangerous coughing fit, and he was forced to pound himself upon the chest. As I went on, he slowly backed himself down the steps, until, as his face came into the moonlight, no one could have failed to perceive that consternation alone was writ upon his face. His little red eyes were opened to an extent no man ever saw before or again. I followed him, whereat he faintly motioned at me with the palm of his hand held outward, as if to keep me off, and retreated toward the gate.

At last we had the satisfaction of seeing his discomfiture complete. He went rapidly down the lane in the moonlight, his chin in his chest, a crushed and humbled man, his dogs slinking after him, not bounding and barking as they had arrived, but carrying their tails concavely on the inner curve. As for myself, I sank, somewhat exhausted, but triumphant, upon the steps.

There is but one thing more to tell of Vawter Fentriss. As I have said, it was his daily habit to sit somewhere about his grounds and exchange quips with every one who passed his house, shouting jibes and jests at every passer-by of his acquaintance until out of hearing, and I had not escaped his feeble wit whenever I went that way. Now let me chronicle the result of this night's address to him: I write it simply, and without parade or pride; but from that time forth he never called another jest at me to the day of his death; and I never afterward passed his house that he did not get up from his seat, or quit whatever he was doing, and go in the house as soon as he caught sight of me. The man had some shame.

Only one week now intervened before my departure, and while the thought of this would naturally cast a dark shadow over the spirits of my friends, causing in them a plainly apparent though silent depression, still, that was a truly delightful period; for the mar-pleasure, William Fentriss, was absent, nor did one of us catch the slightest glimpse of his outrivalled and disgraced head. Each

evening, at earliest dusk, I repaired to the house of my mistress, cogitating by the way, so that the time, though pleasant, should be spent in improvement and to the profit of all three of us—for Mr. Gray still made one of our little party. Many and many a time did he, out of delicacy, arise and make as if to withdraw, but, in spite of a thousand earnest excuses which he offered, Miss Sylvia ever firmly detained him, being a conscientious daughter who would not alone enjoy a pleasure or a benefit when she could possibly share it with those toward whom her duty lay.

On that account I still directed toward the old man a great part of my conversation. To do otherwise, I hold, would have been a graceless act. He had been my nightly companion and constant listener throughout the whole season. Should I desert him now? Such a treachery it was not in my nature to conceive.

Miss Sylvia, as I have indicated, was possessed by a melancholy which grew deeper every day; her face was exceedingly sad; but as for myself, I was conscious of a pleasant tingle of excitement; the highest spirits followed my triumph; and never have I been more joyously inclined,—I could have talked till daylight every night. My excitement took the place of rest, and thus, feeling no need of sleep, I was enabled to make my calls at the Grays' extend far into the night.

In my enthusiasm I selected only the gravest topics, often, I fear, going too deep for Mr. Gray to follow. Let that be as it may, I can truthfully declare that during this week it was an actual pleasure to talk to him. I have no wish to assume undue credit, yet it was a worthy performance to arrest his attention and keep him from brooding upon the business troubles which I have mentioned. To this end I exerted every endeavor; I called into play my utmost powers, as I saw the inroads his anxieties had made upon his hitherto hardy constitution. His hands were nerveless; his flesh had grown flabby; a dull, fishy glaze was come over his eyes, together with a perpetual twitching of the lids which would have softened a heart of adamant.

He was far from being the man he had been at the first of that summer, not only physically, but mentally; for there were

times when the glaze would leave his eyes, and I could see them shining in the darkness with a baleful light, like the eyes of a beast at bay. Simultaneously his sunken lips would work and mumble, and he would whisper hissing to himself.

When these unhappy spells came over him I would fawn on briskly, with whatever discussion was in hand, pretending I noticed nothing. So, presently, his head would fall on his chest, and I would understand—without his saying it—that he was grateful to me for soothing him. It is the unspoken gratitude which is deepest.

William Fentriss took his departure three days before mine, not out of any virtuous anxiety to renew his studies, you may be sure! The afternoon before he went, I had the pleasure of passing him in the lane with Miss Sylvia upon my arm. I could not tell whether it was from sheer insolence, or to conceal (which it did not) the extreme, painful flushing of his face, but he ventured a very low, formal bow, receiving the cut direct for his pains. We swept on with the finest air, and left him standing there with his head bared. I could not repress a pleasant laugh, in which the lady joined me, though I could feel her arm tremble with indignation.

This indignation of hers was not suffered to diminish, for, on returning from our stroll, a note was brought to her, which she opened and read in my presence, her face growing even redder than Will's had been; her hand shook with anger; yet her passion was far from unbecoming.

"Read it," she said, furiously, thrusting the paper upon me. "Read it, sir! Read it, for I would have you carry the answer, which is this scrawl, back to him again. Does he think I will bear everything!"

The note was short; I read it.

"Farewell, madam," it began. "I have just now determined to go away upon the morrow. You have put a great deal of shame upon me, and for nothing. Yet, let me tell you, I have only thanks for your mercies. You and your escort had the pleasure to laugh at me, a little while ago; believe me, your choice of another to favor causes me the greatest mortifica-

tion but the lesser alarm. You will not speak to me. You will not hear me. You draw your skirts aside lest they touch me as you pass. Yet I shall make you listen, make you speak to me, and gladly, ere the year be run. Never fear but I shall win you. Ah, dear Sylvia!"

I did not carry the note to Will myself. I took it home with me, and sent it to him, deciding upon that as the better course. But before I sent it, I sat me down and wrote upon the back of it the words:

"Opened by Miss Gray—and me—by mistake."

CHAPTER IV.

THE INTERVIEW.

AS I turned in at the gate for my last evening, I observed Mr. Gray get up from the porch and go hastily into the house. "Good old man!" I thought, smiling slightly at this mark of his emotion. "His attachment is indeed sincere." Then, during the four or five delightful hours I spent in the society of Miss Sylvia, I discoursed much upon the virtues and delicacy of her father, whereat she seemed somewhat cheered; nevertheless, throughout the whole of our interview her signals of sorrow increased, until, unable to conceal her agitation, she excused herself and withdrew.

I was fearful that she would break down altogether when it came to the farewells of the following afternoon; however, at the final moment she exhibited surprising fortitude and courage. But Mr. Gray—that good old man—Mr. Gray!—ah, there was a parting indeed! The tears stood in his eyes; he said "Good-by" a thousand times, murmuring under his breath words which I could not catch, growing more mixed and incoherent every moment, and finally quite breaking down.

His fingers worked convulsively, so that he had to clinch them tight to hide it; and one of the clearest and most vivid pictures which memory brings of my youth is that which comes before me now, as fresh as though it all happened only yesterday, of the good old man (when I turned and looked back from the road) standing there by the steps, waving his hand to me in farewell, his fingers still clinched to conceal his emotion. His arm

dropped to his side as I turned, and confusion overspread his countenance, for men do not willingly exhibit their deepest feelings. So I left him there in his trouble, with his mouth open.

Ah, how wonderfully, little by little, do the seeds of affection grow! Thus, at the beginning of that summer, Mr. Gray and I were nothing to each other. But, drop by drop, I had watered the simple herb of his attachment till it spread and blossomed into a beautiful and wondrous flower! There was not much in common between us; often I felt his mind unable to accompany mine to those higher pinnacles of thought whereunto my own desired to flee, and after arrival, perch; nor can I say that I ever gave him my whole confidence or friendship; yet the good old man's devotion touched me.

I found William Fentriss already arrived at Nassau Hall. Although we rarely met, and had little to do with each other, I made out that his downfall had no improving effect upon him; indeed, so far as his manner in public was an exponent of his condition, he appeared to have recovered every whit of his pristine jauntiness; he was no less impertinent and easy; nor did he betray a consciousness of the disgrace of his wrong-doing by visible contrition, moral conduct, or a diligent energy at his books. Nevertheless, I learned that he was indifferent to that society he had formerly sought with eagerness in the surrounding country, for now he shunned the ladies, and spent his time dawdling about the country-side on long, lonely rambles, with a face as long (I was convinced, in spite of the gay exterior he presented in company) and as lonely as his walks. This thought was no unpleasant one, and I dwelt upon it somewhat with quiet satisfaction. 'Tis well for impudence to realize that, hide as it may under the finest surface, it is no continuing rival for true merit and intelligent attainment.

The term wore on; the holidays were at hand. It was late of a windy night in December, and I had almost completed my preparations for retiring, when there was a knock at the door. Candle in hand, I drew the bolt, and there, to my astonishment, stood William Fentriss.

I gazed upon him forbiddingly, and inquired his pleasure.

He coolly entered, and dropping at half-length into my easy-chair, crossed his legs in an attitude of foppish languor, placed the tips of the fingers of his two hands lightly together, and looked at me quaintly, with the faint apparition of a smile in his eyes and on his lips. "I petition for a word with the master of all learning," he said, assuming a cheerfulness which well I knew he could not feel. "What a charming nightcap you wear! Faith, there'd be conquests aplenty, if you wore it by day! Ah, if only the la—"

I interrupted him. "I think the subject of conquests may be a sore one for you in my presence. You exhibit a praiseworthy fortitude in referring to it!"

He stared at me a moment. "You give me my just deserts," he rejoined, slowly. "That was well said. We will leave conquests out of our conversation, then, if you please. And may I suggest that you shut the door before you take a cold in that light, though becoming, drapery of yours, Mr. Sudgeberry?"

I took a comfort from my bed, and folding it round me, at the same time eying him sternly, again requested his business with me.

"I thought it possible that you might consent to my company on the journey home for the holidays," he answered. "I suppose you are going?"

"Certainly, sir," I said.

"If I may make so bold, Mr. Sudgeberry, are you going by coach?"

"No, sir; I shall travel upon the back of a horse my father sends for the purpose."

"Good! You will travel upon the back of a horse your father sends for the purpose. Now, I live with my uncle, as you may have been so kind as to notice, and my uncle is to send up one of my horses for the same purpose, as regards the back, you observe, that your father designs yours. Well, the roads are vile, the weather is treacherous, and good Dr. Finley has ordained that no one, under horrid penalties, departs until noon of the twenty-fourth. Therefore, to reach home for Christmas, we shall be compelled to leave here immediately upon the stroke

of twelve; and, the roads and weather being what they are, we stand a chance of riding late into the night, or even of being detained at some way-side tavern until morning. In this, or any case, I offer you my poor company. And also," he continued, with a twinkling glance at me, "we might encounter some gentleman who would be glad to relieve us of our purses, mayhap cut our invaluable throats. We should add to our safety by taking the trip together. Do you think you could bear with me for the dozen hours or so?"

I turned the proposition over in my mind, all my inclinations naturally urging me to give a peremptory and decided refusal. But, on the other hand, I shrank from the contemplation of the journey, short though it was, in winter, without the assurance of company; and Will and I were the only students who would be going that way. The thought of meeting rough fellows was exceedingly discomfoting, the vision of a night attack in the lonely wastes occurring and recurring to me with horror; and my companion's reference to a throat-cutting sending the very chills down my spine. After debating the matter carefully, I finally determined to close with his offer.

"Splendid! splendid!" cries he, waving his hand to me gayly. "Splendid, Mr. Sudgeberry! Have your saddle-bags packed and your nag waiting by noon of the twenty-fourth, and then—Sola for home!"

His gayety sprang up suddenly, and as suddenly fell and passed out of him, so that in the very instant he turned a white, tired face upon me, one much older than he had worn in June. He went to the door, bidding me good-night in a melancholy voice. "Sleep without dreams, Mr. Sudgeberry. Pray for me. 'Nymph, at thy orisons remember—' Good-night, sir!"

It was long before I slept that night; not only because William Fentriss's remarks aroused an uneasiness and fear of misadventure by the way, upon which I was loath to dwell, but I was much disturbed to think that I might be seen, perchance by folk from our parts, with this wild, reputationless fellow for my companion. There was one contingency which was too remote to cause me anxiety. Mr. Gray and his daughter were in New York, and were to return—as my advices from home let me know—the day before Christmas. William and I should be some hours ahead of them, and our chance of meeting was so exceedingly slight that, though I had no mind the Grays should see me riding in such company, I dismissed the possibility from my meditations. I resolved, moreover, that when we came into our own neighborhood I would make some excuse to leave him and ride separately; and I hoped that whoever might see us together would put the best construction on my conduct, and judge that I accompanied him in the hope of improving his courses and directing the irregular channels of his mind.

I was more tranquil in the assurance that William had no inkling of the information I possessed—the present whereabouts and intended journey of Mr. Gray and Miss Sylvia. My own family had it by accident, and, since the night of Vawter's visit, there had been no communication between the households of Fentriss and Gray. Mr. Gray had gone off suddenly to New York on an errand of business, taking his daughter with him, and setting his return for Christmas eve. Considering these and other matters, and repeating to myself fragments connected with the morrow's scholarly duties, I finally closed mine eyes in profound slumber.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

CHERRY

BY BOOTH TARKINGTON

CHAPTER V.

THE JOURNEY.

PROMPTLY at noon of the 24th I was cantering down Nassau Street on my father's stout roan, Jeremiah, and looking about for William Fentriss, who was nowhere to be seen. I may state here that my observation has seldom been in fault, and I have often remarked that those who most emphatically impress upon others the necessity for promptitude are most apt themselves to be dilatory. I was internally commenting on this fact with the appropriate severity, when I caught sight of Dr. and Mrs. Finley coming up the street, and with them, chatting merrily, William Fentriss, clad, with his usual worldliness, in a long white great-coat, a heavy fall of lace at the throat. Beholding me, he waved his hat, and turning to Mrs. Finley, kissed her hand in farewell with all the outlandish airs of a man of fashion. Nevertheless, the Doctor only laughed.

Will mounted a large black horse, held in waiting at the corner, and sending a wild view-halloo ringing on the winter air, set his steed in motion to join me; so we presently left the village at a lively gait. Once out on the country road, however, we were forced to pull into a mild canter; and by the time we crossed Stony Brook, settled down to a dull jog-trot. The day was frosty, the sky overcast; rain had fallen all the previous night, but a chill wind springing up and whistling about our ears uncomfortably, stiffened the mud to just that intolerable heaviness through which rapid progress is impossible for the stoutest beast. Presently a thin, damp snow began to come down, and I thought the prospect of reaching our destination that evening blank indeed; certainly we should be upon the road till long after nightfall.

Such considerations, however, had little effect upon the liveliness of my compan-

ion, which had come up in him extraordinarily. He seemed to be in the most cheerful spirits, carolling and singing, and hailing everybody we met with some frivolity or nonsense in regard to Christmas cheer; and especially was this the case when the person happened to be a carter or farmer with a rosy-cheeked lass alongside. At such times William would never leave off calling out compliments till they were fairly out of hearing, whilst I, inexpressibly mortified, would muffle my face in the cape of my great-coat, hoping to avoid identification.

At the very start I had a feeling—nay, a strong presentiment—that this reckless fellow would disgrace me permanently ere our journey were done; and this impression grew stronger at the tavern in Trenton, where we were forced to stop to warm our numbed limbs, and where I overheard him commanding hot toddy for all the loungers of the bar, and, immediately after, leading the stentorian chorus of a wassail song which made me shudder to the bone. As if this were not enough, after having wasted half an hour in such a fashion, when we once more set off on our way, a score or more of disreputable, red-nosed idlers came out in front of the tavern and cheered us, to my supreme embarrassment. Added to this, my companion publicly chucked a young maid under the chin in the most godless manner. At that I covered my face completely, and clapping spurs to my horse's sides, galloped away as fast as could be, for I had acquaintances in Trenton that I would liefer behold me dead than in such society, or connected with these scandalous goings-on.

The wind had increased to such velocity (shifting its quarter till it blew now in our faces), and we had squandered so much time in the town, that it was after three o'clock of the afternoon when we reached the ferry. Finding ourselves again in motion, on the other side of the

Delaware, it came on to snow very hard, and the earth being soon covered with white, the roads became more difficult than before, the drifts rendering the footing treacherous. Nevertheless, we urged forward as fast as able.

I stuck my chin in my collar, and thought of many improving subjects for conversations which I would have by Mr. Gray's fireside. I also determined how, and in what terms, I would couch my declaration to Miss Sylvia. In spite of my knowledge of the unfruitfulness of the soil in which to plant good seed, I would have turned from these musings to an endeavor to inculcate moral principles in the youth beside me, but whenever I opened my mouth to speak, the wind flew in so quickly as to take the words back into my throat before they were uttered.

Indeed, the storm had grown fierce to such degree that Fentriss now rode in silence, his face muffled up so that only his eyes showed, though ever and anon he slapped his arms about for warmth, and gave vent to ejaculations the tenor of which I gathered to be objurgative of the weather. Darkness closing in early, our journey became the more difficult and our progress slower and slower. We were nearly overcome with cold, and quite exhausted, when we reached the King George Inn, and seeking a temporary refuge in the tap-room, thawed our extremities at a fire. The landlord warned us against continuing our journey on such a night, but we ventured again into the tempest, deciding to go on to Hoag's Tavern, some five miles distant, where, in case there was no abatement of the external violence, we could spend the night.

It had by this time grown so bitter that no covering afforded protection from the blast, and our horses stumbled wearily as they picked their way through the drifts and over the uneven ground. The dark was upon us; the wind howled over the fields and shrieked dismally amongst the trees. The loneliness of that scene would have given rise to a tremor in the stoutest heart, and caused all the idle tales of travellers waylaid and murdered to recur, with appalling force, to the most serious and scholarly mind.

At last, through scudding snowflakes, the welcome lights of Hoag's Tavern

shone on our view, and soon after our steeds were munching their fodder in the stable; two guest-chambers were being aired and warmed for our slumbers; and we, divested of our boots and outer wrappings, found ourselves seated at a hot supper before a blazing fire.

"Faith, Mr. Sudgeberry, it was a wicked wind!" cried Fentriss as we took our chairs. "I am sure you have suffered greatly to-day. 'Tis the first time I can recall ever being in your company when you did not beguile each minute with useful and instructive discourse; and it would have brought tears to Mr. Gray's eyes to see you speechless so long. No doubt we shall make up for lost time this evening."

He fell to at the viands with a vivacious appetite, and I confess I followed his example; nevertheless, though hungry, I did not confine myself to the satisfaction of purely physical wants, but at the same time reproved my *vis-à-vis* for speaking of what was useful and instructive as mere beguilement, and continued by pointing out at length the superior usage that conversation should be put to, a usefulness far above any mere passing of the time.

We had almost finished our repast, and I was bringing my remarks to a summing-up, when we were interrupted by the arrival of a traveller, who, like ourselves, had been forced to seek shelter from the blast and give up all hope of continuing his journey till the morrow.

This was a ruddy little man of sixty-five or so, covered with snow from head to foot. He flung his saddle-bags in a corner, shaking off the snow with a great fuss and stamping of his jack-boots, at the same time, in a manner exhibiting considerable flourish, he introduced himself as Mr. O'Donnell of New York, late of Belfast, travelling to Philadelphia to spend Christmas with a cousin. He accepted with alacrity William's invitation to join us at table, and, the landlord bringing in fresh supplies, he devoured his victuals with such gusto as to overtake us at the last mouthful, by which time I had discovered that he was a great talker, and, a lamentable thing in one of his years, without that sobriety of meaning, that earnestness of purpose, which lend grace and dignity to any age. Nay,

his talk, though incessant, contained never one rounded period of length and sonorous rendition; it was as jerky as the movements of his active little body.

"And so," he cried, as he wiped the crumbs from his mouth and pushed back his chair—"and so ye tell me ye're a pair of scholars makin' home from the hard study! Then I've heard of ye!"

"Indeed!" rejoined William. "Mr. Sudgeberry's learning is already famous, then?"

"And so it is!" exclaimed the stranger, leaning back and rubbing his hands hard together, while he looked from one to the other of us and back again, with eyes that twinkled very brightly, like a bird's, in the glow of our heaping fire. Indeed, he had just the spryness of a canary, in spite of the bald head and gray hair that showed his age more plainly when the heat of the room caused him to lay aside the heavy periwig he wore.

"Aha!" he cried. "Indeed the gentleman's learning is celebrated to the extent me ears fairly ring with what I am hearing of it. But, sirs, I've heard of both of ye!"

"Of both of us?" I echoed, mystified.

"Yes, but I have, though—from old man Gray."

"What!" said William, laying down his fork.

"Ha, ha! I thought this was the way of it!" cried the new-comer. "I left New York this very morning in company with him and his daughter. Aha! Which of ye is blushing? Both, be all that's scandalous, both!"

William had risen to his feet. "Where are they? Where did you leave them? Are they on the road?" he cried. "Do you mean to tell me they risked the—"

Mr. O'Donnell cut him off with a roar of laughter. "No, no!" he shouted. "Give me a chance till I present the news of it. No, sir. 'Twas you that stopped him—the pair of ye, I mean!" He rocked himself in his chair in the throes of enjoyment so exquisite it was nearer agony, and for several moments was unable to continue.

"Which of ye," he sputtered at last—"now which of ye is the old man hidin' that jew'l of a girl from?"

"What, sir!" cries William. "What, what, what!"

"'Tis just as I'm tellin' ye," answered Mr. O'Donnell. "Old Gray was for pushin' home, spite of storm and wind and all the snow in the world, he was, till we reached the King George Inn, which we did some half-hour after ye'd left it. There the landlord told us two boys from the college, makin' down this way, had gone on to Hoag's for the night. When old Gray heard that, he asked in a hurry was one of them a handsome, gay-lookin' rip with a wicked gray eye, and the other—and the other—"

Here Mr. O'Donnell turned to me with a polite wave of the hand, and again repeating "and the other," was seized with a fit of choking. He got up and walked about the room in evident distress, gasping out, "Pound me on the back!" and, "Let me have it hard!" with various like objurgations between paroxysms, which instructions William, who had gone to his assistance, carried out heartily. When Mr. O'Donnell grew easier and was somewhat master of himself, he dropped feebly into a chair, whispering weakly, with a wag of his head at me, "And the other—like yerself, sir!"

"What happened then, if you please?" asked William, anxiously.

"The landlord told him yes, ye were, and Gray swore never another step from the place would he budge the night; and that left me to come on alone."

"Leaving them at the King George?"

"Yes, sir—five miles back. The old gentleman said he didn't mind dyin' by storm or freezing. 'It's a comparatively sudden death,' says he, 'and I understand it's painless and easy over. But I'll not risk worse,' says he; 'so here we stay the night!' Gentlemen, I believe I should warn ye against continuing whatever it is ye've been doin' to Gray; he may work ye harm. He was the desperate-lookin' old man when he said that same."

William began to pace the floor with hurried steps, but I was plunged into solemn cogitations. Do but judge the mixture of my feelings: my sentiments when I learned that the charming object of my affections was so close at hand, and, indeed, that I should have seen her this very evening at Hoag's, except for William Fentriss's presence there; and oh, alas! my mortification that she and her father should learn I was his travel-

ling companion! Gossip is not always utterly evil, since it was gossip took down William's spirit; but 'tis a very petard, dangerous to the innocent, in such a one as that prating old landlord of the King George, a needless babbler whom I loathed with an acute loathing.

"What time does Mr. Gray mean to pursue his journey?" Fentriss inquired, too carelessly, of Mr. O'Donnell.

"He's up at five in the morning, the mad old ripster, and looks to be home for to-morrow's breakfast. They start before dawn."

"How does he travel?" asked William.

"How does he travel!" echoed the other. "Faith, then, on the road!"

"No, no; I mean his travelling-carriage. Has he—"

"His own chaise and four."

"Oh!" said William. "Thank you." He stopped in his walking the floor, and stood by the chimney-piece, regarding the ruddy flames attentively, prodding a log end with his slipper. "Postilion?" he asked.

"Two boys; fine cattle under 'em, sir."

"Ah! Man atop with a blunderbuss?"

"No. The times and the road are not so bad as that, are they?"

"Well," returned Fentriss, thoughtfully, "there's no telling. The boys have pistols, have they?"

"Have they pistols! Is there an escort of dragoons! Do they carry artillery! And have I fallen in with a couple of highwaymen? Holy powers!" cried our new acquaintance, excitedly, with a sounding slap on his thigh. "Holy powers! I understand ye! It's an elopement ye're planning!"

"Nay, nay!" exclaimed William, turning a furious crimson, and lifting both hands in protest. "My dear sir, my dear sir—"

"Dear sir, dear sir!" shouted the little man, mocking him. "Don't ye 'dear sir' me! I thought ye were precious solicitous for the old gentleman's safety. Aha! 'A gay-lookin' rip,' says Gray, 'a gay-lookin' rip, with a wicked gray eye!' Faith, he knew ye! Aha!"

"Nay, nay!" cried William.

"Ay, ay!" exclaimed the other. "And I'm in with ye! I must be counted in: I

wouldn't have missed it for all the world and universe. Ye'll find me a great hand at the business, sir. I'm along in years, they'll tell ye, but into every wickedness came near me since the age of five; goin' miles and miles out of me way to embroil meself in any and all dev—"

"Will you hear me?" William broke in, impatiently. "You far misunderstand me; I haven't a ghost of the intentions you impute, especially since an elopement would be far from the point, and, if I should—if I should, I repeat—if I should entertain any preposterous and impossible design whatsoever, then, sir, let me tell you that the mere presence of this sober-minded and well-behaved comrade of mine, Mr. Sudgeberry, here, would cause me to abandon it in its conception, and be ashamed I *could* conceive it, such is his restraining—nay, his solemn—influence."

Mr. O'Donnell rose from his chair, went close to William and looked him earnestly in the eye for several seconds, ending with the flicker of one of his eyelids. William's glance wandered to me, then fell, abashed; and at this the other began first to smile, and then to laugh.

"Me boy," he cried to William—"me boy, I like ye," and slapped him on the back with a thump that nigh carried the recipient off his feet. "I like ye. I make no doubt we shall spend as pleasant an evening as the heart could desire, even if ye're not for whippin' away from old Gray with that lovely girl across yer saddle. Let be the elegant storm a-ragin' out-doors, 'tis all the tidier night we'll make within!"

They shook hands, laughing together most heartily, presenting a picture of unseemly merriment, of which I could make nothing, but sat staring at them in wonderment.

My conjectures were cut short by the arrival of the landlord, Hoag, a man of monstrous corpulence, who waddled in bearing a huge bowl of brown punch, followed by several servants with fresh logs for the fire, and pipes and tobacco.

"By your leave, gentlemen," cried the host; "by your leave! You are the only guests in the house to-night, and on such an occasion I hope you'll not think I presume in begging you to be guests of the house, as well; 'tis the custom of Hoag's

place, and I pray you'll join me in this cheer of Christmas eve."

If the choice had been left to me, I should have declined this invitation; but my two companions greeted it with hilarious favor, Mr. O'Donnell, without any words on the matter, filling a cup for himself before the bowl reached the table, and launching a song upon the instant.

"Then sing!" he began, loudly:

"Good cheer to him who loves a maid!
Hooroo for him who's not afraid,
For her dear sake,
The laws to break!
We'll sing to him, and yet we say:
Lord save the King and his highway!

"And I give you the health of me new comrade-in-arms, Mr. Fentriss!" he finished.

Soon, to my vast annoyance, the room was reeking with the noxious fumes of nicotine, while the rafters rang to the laughter of William, Mr. O'Donnell, and the fat landlord, as they pledged each other (and everything else under the sun) in the hot punch. Mr. O'Donnell was the noisiest little man I ever saw; he trolled forth a dozen catches and ballads of Christmas eve, one after another, without pause, and followed them up with wanton music—on a comb and paper—of his own composing, he claimed; and well I believed him, for more villanous sounds I never heard.

Finally he turned to me. "Come, me young Erasmus!" bawls he, as though I had been a mile away. "Join the festivities. Oh, why should the harp on our green hills be silent, and why has me true love no welcome for me? Give us a toast, me scholar—or, can ye sing?"

"Heaven forbid," quoth I, rising, "that I should practise such levities! Why a series of noises at varying pitches should be held pleasing to the ear has always passed my comprehension. We are now rapidly approaching an age when such barbarous proclivities of the more advanced Caucasian races shall be relegated to those savages from which they have sprung, and such an age every rational intellect must anticipate with symptoms of earnest pleasure."

Thereupon, the landlord, Mr. O'Donnell, and William Fentriss having seated themselves, I branched into a description of the glories of the coming era. I di-

lated upon the later achievements of scholarship, going at length into the researches of science and learning during the last five centuries, and comparing our present theories with those of the ancients, deduced the results which must inevitably follow in the future from the trend of modern thought, finally concluding with a carefully correct quotation from a work of infinite merit which exactly coincided with my own views.

I was listened to with the most flattering attention, for true learning commands respect even amongst the most ribald minds. Fentriss, gazing into the fire, appeared to be internally revolving my observations with profound consideration; Hoag sat in the shadow of the chimney-piece, so that he could be only dimly discerned, but his absolute silence betokened entire attentiveness; while little Mr. O'Donnell, favoring me with an extremely polite interest, followed my every gesture with open mouth. As I concluded, he sprang to his feet, and seizing a candle from the shelf, exclaimed that he must see me to my room himself.

"For," cries he, "I see that ye're worn out and need rest, and our worthy landlord is so immersed in meditation, brought on be the masterly conversation with which we've been favored, that I'll just save him the trouble. Let us leave him to his reflections. Aha! 'tis the wonderful man ye are, Mr. Sudgeberry! Ye've talked for an hour and a half beyond any one I ever heard before. I gathered something of yer powers from what Mr. Gray said at the King George, but the old man didn't do ye half justice. He's too old to put it the way it should be, and besides, his vocabulary is too small for it. It would take a young man, yes, sir, and an athlete at that, in the full possession of his faculties, to describe ye properly, sir. Indeed, sir," he went on to say, as he lighted me up the stairs, "ye've surpassed me wildest expectations of ye, and they were great!" Then, as he turned to leave me, at the door of my room, he asked, "Me boy, how old are ye?"

"Nineteen," I returned.

"Nineteen!" quoth he. "Nineteen! 'Tis just stupendous! Nineteen! Ah, I'm wishing I could see ye in yer prime!"

Not without a higher opinion of Mr. O'Donnell, and a fear that I had done him scant justice in my first rating of him, I entered my chamber and prepared for the night.

As I composed my limbs for slumber, my thoughts were divided between regrets that my friends had heard of my present association with Fentriss, and musings on the delightful meeting of the morrow. Reflecting, however, that my mind might be better employed, I mentally repeated an oration of Cicero, in order to assure myself that my memory retained it with accuracy, and presently found myself in a fair way to peaceful sleep, when a great disturbance—shouting and laughter, roaring songs, and the clinking of glasses—broke out in the room below, warning me that those pernicious revels, which I congratulated myself I had subdued by a rational conversation, were again in progress.

The tavern was of a shambling character, walls and floors undeadened, whereby, the room in which the roisterers sat being directly beneath me, I could not fail to catch every sound.

It was not long till my elevated opinion of Mr. O'Donnell had sunk again to an extreme low ebb, and I fell into a great pity for his cousin in Philadelphia and the people at the house he said he was on his way to visit. Nay, my meditations took a more sombre turn. What assurance had I that the little man was what he represented himself to be? Was there not, indeed, at least a possibility his business might be of so dark a nature that I shuddered to put a name to it? Why had he accompanied the Grays from New York? Why had he not remained at the King George with them? Why had he pushed on down the road ahead of them? Was it, as he had represented, simply to be nearer his destination in the morning that he had braved, alone, the perils of the storm? These vague suspicions were far from being soothed away by the nature of the song the little man shouted amidst great applause from Fentriss and Hoag, who joined in the chorus.

"I'll now give ye," I heard O'Donnell say—"I'll now give ye a fav'rit' song of the road, and the name of it's called 'The Bold Boy.'" Forthwith he began:

"Oh, the night it's joy
To the old Bold Boy,
Though he's shy from view;
And the mist hangs gray
On his dancing bay
When the coach is due!"

Chorus: ("Now all of ye join in!")

"Lord save the King and the King's highway!
Bold Boy he's out till the break o' day.
Good luck and all to his dear love true!
Good luck to him and his sweetheart too!
For her dear sake
The laws he'll break.
Good luck and all, with the Grand Hooroo!"

The chorus was variable, alternating the stanza just quoted with the one sung by Mr. O'Donnell upon the entrance of the punch-bowl. He sang eleven or twelve stanzas of this sinister ditty, and the others joined the chorus each time with a palpable intention to raise the roof. It was marvellous how three men could make so much noise and so persistently. They kept it up till I thought the pangs of exhaustion must have caused them to cease, but the passage of time only appeared to increase their vigor. I tossed from side to side, until, quite worn out with the effort to obtain relief in slumber, I lay on my couch in distress too great to move another inch.

The only respite I obtained was for half an hour or so, during which the three held an earnest conversation in low tones. The tenor of it I could not determine, though ever and anon they gave vent to delirious chucklings, and once I heard the landlord mention my own name, and Fentriss assuring him that I was long since sound asleep, and tired enough to stay so until late in the morning. Hoag left the party for a time, and I made out that he returned with four or five men who walked with heavy steps, servants about the inn, I supposed, hostlers or what not. They were invited to fill their glasses, and complied with great laughter and a hoarse song to Christmas, after which Mr. O'Donnell sang his song of the road again—twice.

The addition of the low party to the company, and their all joining in toasts and singing, produced an uproar which was like utterly to confound my feverish brain. At last exhausted Nature claimed her own, and in spite of the go-

ings-on beneath me, I dropped into a painful stupor, not to be called sleep, a state nearer a swooning perturbation of the whole being than slumber, and troubled by malignant visions. More as it were in dreams than in reality, it seemed a semi-quiet fell in the room below; after that, a sound of feet stumbling over the whole house, in every part and division of it, and of doors flung open and slammed to. One called loudly for his boots, and Fentriss's voice said, "Hush!" Another fell over a chair and cried out with vehemence. Then all was still, and I had a long dream of a battle wherein I suffered greatly.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. SUDGEBERRY'S RECKLESS HUMOR.

... "For her dear sake
The laws he'll break.
We'll sing to him, and yet we say:
Lord save the King and his highway!"

METHOUGHT I was at the point of meeting of two great regiments of horse, charging down on each other, while they thundered this chorus; but at the crucial moment my mind leaped instantly into full, alert wakefulness, all my being creeping with horror in the darkness. Everything was silent—silent! I sat up in bed and listened.

"Hooroo for him who's not afraid!"

There came faintly to my hearkening ear the murmur, like a failing echo, of that rude chorus, as if it came from far down the road.

"Lord save the King and his highway!"

The suspicions I had entertained of O'Donnell suddenly recurred to me with terrible keenness, bringing with them thoughts so wild that a fit of sinking was their accompaniment. When I had mastered this somewhat, I had a painful apprehension that there was a strange presence in the room; so I crept out of the covers strategically, went to the door, and felt to see if it was still bolted on the inside. All was secure. Returning cautiously toward the bed, I overturned a chair; it fell like a church. The noise of it in the hush ran through the house in a ghastly resonance, seeming to rattle the doors of a hundred empty rooms

for admission. I stood stock-still, and the renewed silence was as startling as the noise had been. Then, again, I heard the murmur of that evil chorus, farther away, fainter.

I tiptoed to the window and looked out. The tempest had long since passed; the night was clear and brilliant with stars over the great wastes of snow. In the distance I made out a dark patch against the vasty white, a blur of shifting shape.

This blur was moving slowly, steadily northward. If it was made of men and horses, they were going up the road—the significant and sinister thought flashed into my mind—*toward the King George Inn!*

Not daring to risk a candle, I began to grope for my garments, and to get them upon me as rapidly as was consistent with complete noiselessness, shivering with unspeakable misgiving at the least rustling caused by my haste and the darkness. It was impossible to find all my apparel under such conditions; indeed, I put forth no efforts toward a toilet, but was occupied far more acutely with considerations of an apprehensive character. What *was* Hoag's Tavern? Was it one of those ominous hostelryes where men entered but departed never? I had not stopped in the place before, nor, on my passing by, had I done better than merely note its existence. I remembered no word of its repute. Who and what was the landlord? What connection had he with O'Donnell? And into what plot had they persuaded the weak and reckless Fentriss? Was it possible that they had decoyed him to his destruction? or had *he*, giving way to the desperation of a despised suitor, and welcoming any mad deed as a relief from his own thoughts, bribed and persuaded them to some contemplated violence? But above all these grewsome conceptions there rose one anguished self-reproach: Why had I, like an ill-considering boy, rushed blindly into the unknown, entering this strange inn, which might be a death-trap for aught I knew, without question or cavil, blindly walking to my possible doom, alone and defenceless! They had gone up the road toward the King George Inn;—what had they left in the house for me?

I looked down from the window; it was too long a drop for safety; the thought of attempting such a thing was loathsome to my soul; and I had no more confidence in a rope of bedclothes than in my ability to construct one, or to descend it, supposing it made. I must go out through the house; for I had settled in my mind to get out-of-doors by some means; waiting there in the darkness for what might happen was too horrid to think of. Therefore, summoning the greatest degree of fortitude consistent with the occasion, I stealthily slid the bolt, and opening the door, stole out upon the landing in my stockinged feet.

I remained a considerable time motionless, though the landing was very cold. A hideous creak came from the stairs below, and I leaped back into my room, closed and bolted the door again. Then, after some minutes, concluding that the sound had been caused by the chill in the wood, I issued anew. Twice more did the creaking oblige me to seek refuge within, but at last I gathered my will and descended the stairs, one at a time, shivering from head to heel, my back feeling apprehensive of dangers in the rear.

At the foot of the stairway a patch of faint light lay on the floor, coming from the chamber where the revels had been indulged. Now, employing infinite stealth, I pressed my body close against the wall in the shadow, and crooking my neck so that only the top of my head and my eyebrows might be visible to any occupant if he chanced to gaze at the spot where they appeared (which I had good hopes he might not do), I peered within. There was no one there.

Only blank disorder met my gaze; the empty punch-bowl broken on the floor; the fire a heap of smouldering ashes; the cloth stained and awry; chairs were upset; only one candle remained, burning low in its socket; everywhere was the dreariest confusion, but all a-brooding with a quiet which awed my soul. Something in that fateful hush—I know not what—gave me assurance that the whole house was as empty as the room before my eyes. From the bar the ticking of the tall timepiece could be heard—the only sound except my breathing. The hour sounded. It was five o'clock, and Christmas morning.

Taking the candle, I peered into the rooms on each hand, into the hall and kitchen; not a mouse was stirring. Finding my boots in the kitchen, I drew them on, lit a lantern from the wall, and crept cautiously out of that deserted tavern by the back way, following the path to the stables. The snow was trampled as by a regiment, and what was my horror to find the stables as barren of life as the house! Nay, for here not only man was missing, the beasts were absent; not a horse was in the place; my own, Jeremiah, gone with the rest.

Upon this discovery my sinking-spell returned; an uncomfortable perspiration immediately followed, so that I was forced to sit upon a heap of straw, shivering and chilled. Now, in ruminating upon the painfulness of my situation as I spied about the house, I had reached a certain conclusion, and had formed a determined resolution, the latter being hopelessly foiled by the absence of Jeremiah and all other horses. This was the conclusion, and no doubt of its correctness was left in me: an attack upon Mr. Gray's carriage had been meditated, agreed to, and was now in process of execution, with the abduction and kidnapping of Miss Gray by William Fentriss as part of a design which might include the murder of her good old father. My resolution had been to saddle my horse, then taking the opposite direction from the scene of conflict, to speed down the road until I reached the first house where I could send back aid to the imperilled chaise, while I went on to inform the authorities. But I was left by those horse-robbing villains not only without the means for such a course, but at the mercy of the first wretch to return. My blood paused in its circulation as I thought of the aged but reckless O'Donnell, or the powerful Hoag.

A daring idea entered my head as I sat there in the straw. 'Twas a conception so foolhardy as to cause my flesh to creep, one which my soberer judgment condemns as the rash project of a youth of nineteen. This was to reconnoitre—going *toward* the impending violence, mind you, instead of away from it! Yet, favored by fortune, I believed I might hope to come through with my life, the more as it was quite dark and I was

under no necessity to approach the rascals within pistol-shot. Also, a four-foot hedge ran along the east side of the road, and it was my intention to creep forward in its shelter to hearing distance of the conflict, if possible. Such was the wildness of the mood which now took possession of me!

Blowing out my lantern, I stole forth to the road, and began to grope along through the snow behind the hedge. My heart throbbed with excitement, and ever and anon, the thought of the peril in which I stood coming with great vividness to my mental vision, I paused and reviewed the risk I ran.

But my reckless humor returned each time, and with the low-muttered words, "It is all for Sylvia!" on I pressed. My progress was slow, the snow having piled high on the hither side of the hedge, and so unevenly that several times I stumbled and measured my length in its depths, when it filled the tops of my boots and penetrated every aperture in my hastily donned apparel. A great quantity appeared to have wormed its way inside my collar, where it lay without my having the power to dislodge it, and melting, ran down my back; my head was very cold, my nightcap affording insufficient protection, for I had been unable to discover my hat.

In such discomfort, my teeth chattering the while, I had accomplished some three-quarters of a mile or so, when I unfortunately fell into a wide ditch which ran through the field.

I plunged through its brittle lidding of thin ice, and, after a great struggle and floundering, got upon my feet, more dead than alive, but with the words, "For Sylvia's and old Mr. Gray's sakes!" on my lips. As I climbed up the farther bank there was a sudden loud shout from the road, not ten feet away. Startled as I was, I recognized the voice as that of William Fentriss. There was an answering cry from above, and a man forced his horse close to the hedge and peered into the darkness.

Apprehending, not without reason, a third spell of that terrible sinking, I crept close under the bushes and lay still, while the streams of water running from every portion of my attire melted the snow in all directions.

"Will, me boy," called the second voice, which I was at no loss to attribute to the terrible O'Donnell, "have ye fell in the brook?"

"No," returned the other. "Some animal must have blundered in."

"Some animal!" cries O'Donnell. "Do ye have hippopotami wandering over the fields in this country? I'm thinking 'twas a drove of them by the splashin'. Keep an eye open for um. Where's me mask? I'm off to take command of me merry men. Ha, ha! Cap'n Blacknight and his bloodthirsty crew!"

He set his horse in motion and cantered up the road, while my veins stagnated at his sinister words.

"Be careful of your gallant roan, Captain," William called after him.

"The steed of young Erasmus!" the villain yelled in return.

It was too true: the Irish criminal had stolen my horse, lending his own to some other member of the band. I sighed for poor Jeremiah in such unhallowed hands, but the desperate nature of my own situation required all the resources of my intelligence, especially as Fentriss, leaning over the hedge, looking for the supposed animal, presently discharged a pistol at a small bush near me.

My first impulse was to cry out and warn him that I was no lurking beast, but the words froze tight ere they left my throat, because the thought struck me with frightful force that William's desperation must be a thousandfold increased by the knowledge that he had a human—instead of a brute—witness of his enterprise, and I saw no hope in appealing to his friendship. Nay!—I believed that any declaration of my presence would render his aim only more accurate.

My position was untenable; every movement became a crisis. With Fentriss and the ditch cutting off my escape in the rear, the cutthroat band in front, which way was I to turn? The pistol shot decided for me; hence, with no alternative, I began at once to creep forward, and as soon as I considered it comparatively safe, to run, still leaning close to the hedge—so close, indeed, as to leave particles of my wearing apparel upon its projections, my face and hands suffering considerably from scratches. Meanwhile

my brain was in a tumult of confusion, a thousand questions surging through it. Was the abduction of Miss Gray the only design of the scoundrels? Why was Fentriss left behind? Did their plan include robbery or murder, or both? Why had I been so venturesome?

Why had I not remained in the stable and waited under a pile of straw for daylight? Now, the growing light would not save, but ruin me, with its hideous revelation of my position—caught between two fires! In the east there was already a sombre glow; the western skies, responding with long red streaks, betokened the approach of dawn, while the horizontal stars waxed paler every moment.

A shrill whistle was suddenly blown from the road near by. I dropped flat on my face, then, peering through the hedge, what was my horror to find I had run full into the nest of them! I recognized O'Donnell by my poor Jeremiah; the treacherous landlord, Hoag, by his monstrous girth, though all faces were masked with black cloth. Their followers were distributed on both sides of the road, every man leaning forward in his saddle, listening intently.

"Hark!" said the landlord.

From the distance came the faint cry of a postilion urging his leaders; and then, carried on the wintry air, a few bars of a lively Christmas song, blown on the post-horn.

"Aha!" shouted O'Donnell. "Take your places, me knights of the road!"

"Don't put me too much in the thick of it, Cap'n," whispered Hoag, plucking at the other's arm. "I'm a well-known man and easy recognized."

"Stay back a bit, then," replied O'Donnell. "But ye must bear a good hand in the noise."

"Trust me for that," answered Hoag, wheeling his horse about. He rode over and reined in so close to the spot in the hedge where I lay that I scarce dared breathe, for I could plainly hear his own asthmatic wheezing. My uneasiness was thus augmented at every turn; the man was actually almost over my head; indeed, I could have touched his stirrup by passing my hand through the hedge, without moving the rest of my body. He had an old bell-mouthed blunderbuss across his saddle, and flourished a long

cutlass, wearing no sheath that I could discover.

O'Donnell, with two others, rode slowly forward about thirty paces; three more followed them at a slight distance. Then I realized that the chaise had drawn much nearer; it came at a clipping gait, and as the sounds which heralded its approach fell clearer on the ear, mine heart was like to burst. We could hear the postilion carolling and urging his horses between snatches of song. We could hear the creak of the heavy wheels over the snow, the rattle of harness, the clinking of chains; we heard the rapid, muffled hoof-beats of the four; and now, with tossing heads and the snow flying from their heels, they swept round a turn in the road and were upon us.

There rang out on the frosty air a shout:

"Stand and deliver!"

The villain O'Donnell fairly hurtled my poor Jeremiah and himself against the leaders; his immediate followers pursued the same tactics; the chaise stopped with a shock; the leaders reared; one boy was flung off; the plunging four were swung into the hedge, while the brigands of the reserve wheeled into line across the road. The second postilion, knocked from his horse in mid-act to draw a pistol, was immediately bound to a tree; but there came a shot from the interior of the vehicle; a woman's scream was also heard in that quarter, together with an expression of outraged astonishment and indignation in a vocabulary which caused me to shudder for old Mr. Gray's future.

What followed was such a confusion and passed so quickly as to beggar all description. Suffice it to say that the villains who had assaulted the chaise forthwith raised such an uproar and din as no mortal ever heard before. They discharged their pistols in the air, and hammered the sides of the carriage with them, keeping up a most horrid tumult and shouting the while. In all my agony of mind I found time to puzzle at such conduct on the part of highwaymen; it passed my comprehension.

By far the most successful in this ear-splitting competition was that scoundrel landlord Hoag, so near whom it was my misfortune to have made my hiding-place. He began to discharge his piece as

fast as he could load; letting it off in every direction under the sun, now in the air overhead, now in the hedge within a yard of my body, so that I gave up all for lost, and at the same time he set up a heathenish bellowing and howling and horrid screaming and squealing, the like never heard outside a mad-house. The others behaved as completely beside themselves as he, and such pandemonium reigned there on the road, that cold Christmas morning, as would have convinced a passer-by he witnessed an orgy of Hades.

Suddenly, from down the way, we heard a great cry: "*A rescue! A rescue!*"

A single horseman came galloping up the road, the reins flung over his horse's neck, a long sword in one hand, a pistol in the other. "*Hold, curs!*" he shouted. "*Turn, dogs, and meet your doom!*" Then, discharging his pistol, he flew into the dark mass of combatants about the chaise. It was William Fentriss!

The uproar now redoubled. A more furious clashing of steel and sound of buffeting, combined with grewsome shrieking and heart-rending groans, was not heard at Blenheim when the French and English horse met by the tens of thousands. Up and down the road, across and over, all round the chaise, the combat raged, with the horrible and prodigious noises ever increasing, while inside the vehicle old Mr. Gray never once ceased from his frightful profanity throughout the engagement.

A thousand cries pierced the ear:

"Ha, have at you, then!" "So, caittiff!" "I'm a dead man!" "We can never conquer him!" and the like; but, over all, rose a voice I knew for O'Donnell's in spite of his attempt to disguise it:

"Fly, fly, me boys; this fiend is invincible! Away, or we are all dead men! Fly! Back to the cave to count our losses!"

"Fly, fly!" cried the others, and, "Don't forget the wounded!" and, "Back to the cave! Escape, escape!" They wheeled about, with great shouting and clatter and screams of fear. The rascally Hoag let off his blunderbuss for a last time almost directly over my head, so that my face was blackened with the discharge and my nightcap full of sparks; added to

this villany, the scoundrel had so infuriated his horse by the inhuman disturbance he raised, that when he endeavored to turn and join his fellow-conspirators in their flight, the maddened beast reared upon his posterior limbs, then plunged, and the huge bulk of the innkeeper crashed down through the hedge and landed with extraordinary force at my feet. At the same time, with the sound of a smothered laugh and of galloping hoof-beats down the road, the other villains were gone.

William was setting the postilions at liberty, for both had been tied up, when I heard a sound different in character from those which had so horridly assailed us. This was a light and mellow voice, Sylvia's, yet it held a more vibrant thrill of agitation than all the hoarse clamors preceding. She had sprung from the chaise and was standing by the steps, both hands outstretched toward Fentriss.

"Will!" she cried. "Will!"

He turned to her, and started. "*You!*" he said. "Ah, how I have waited!"

I leaped to my feet. "Unconscionable reprobate!" I shouted; but they did not hear me, nor in that gray light take note of me. I pressed hard into the hedge to break through, beginning to shout again, but I had not half the word "unconscionable" out of my mouth when I was clasped about the middle and flung to earth beneath the weight of the landlord, I on my face, the ponderous villain on my back.

"Hush!" he whispered, angrily. "All's safe if we lay by, now. What on earth were you doing?"

"Help!" I shouted, but he clapped his hand over my mouth and held me down, though I strove frantically to rise.

"Hold your tongue!" he whispered. "What do you mean? It's me, it's Hoag; there's nothing to fear. Would you spoil the fun now, when we've carried all out so nobly, and the young man so liberal to you lads? Why didn't you ride ahead? Were you thrown too? It's Bates, isn't it?"

He took his hand from my mouth, and I attempted to raise another shout, but he buried my face in the snow so instantly, by a shove of his hand on the top of my head, that only a brief gurgle was allowed to issue from me.

"Ha!" exclaimed he. "'Tis the punch, is it? Then I'll hold you fast till they're gone, as a warning not to take such advantage of a free bowl next time!" And he plunged me deeper into the snow.

Only my anger prevented me from swooning through the miseries of this position, knowing that my perfidious rival was receiving the homage due a hero, while I, powerless to prevent, must lie, not ten yards away, choking in the snow under that monstrosity, Hoag!

"In, in with you!" I heard Mr. Gray cry heartily. "I'll take your horse. Not a word, not a word. Heavens, heavens! but who ever saw such swordsmanship! Now, boys, halloo, then! On, on!"

The boys called "Ay, ay!" They spoke to the horses, and I underwent the agony of hearing the cavalcade move forward.

"There!" said Hoag. "You'd have made a fine mess of it, wouldn't you! You ought to be whacked for risking a betrayal of the gentleman, but I suppose we'll have to forgive it for the day's sake." He shook all through the puffy flanges of his person with a great chuckling. "Ha, ha! Of all the wild nights I ever spent! But the fun of it! They're gone," he continued, as the noise of the chaise grew fainter in the distance. "There; you may get up, Bates."

He slowly removed himself from me, but did not rise; instead, he merely rolled over into the hedge in a burst of laughter.

"Bates!" he cried, "Bates! if you was only sober, and intelligent when sober, the fun of this night would be the death of you, as it's like to be of me! That mad rogue, that young Fentriss! Who but one like him, and that ripping, rearing old O'Donnell, could ha' thought out and performed such a plan! And old Gray!—Did you hear him? Did you hear—oh, ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

I brought his roaring to a sudden end. The cutlass he had carried during the engagement of the chaise had spun over the hedge ahead of him when he fell, and as soon as he released me I made myself its master. This done, I came and stood over him, my indignation too great for utterance. I looked down at the shaking mass of flesh with no more fear of it than of a kitten, for I now understood the heinous plottings of the

night. No, not fear moved in my bosom, but a righteous and devouring wrath. As the first measure of justice, the huge calf of the landlord's leg striking my eye temptingly, without hesitation I caused the point of the cutlass to penetrate the flesh; whereat he left off laughing with a surprising shriek, and sat up against the hedge abruptly, staring at me with a countenance of the utmost ruefulness and consternation.

"Villain!" I cried, and threatened him with my sword again.

"It ain't Bates!" he whispered, huskily. "It ain't Bates!"

"Villain!"

"Who is it?" he asked, appealingly. "Tell me who it is."

"Rascal, you know me well enough," cried I.

"No, no," he answered, with a frightened look. The light was growing stronger; he could see me plainly, but, still refusing to recognize me, gazed upon me from head to foot with a bewildered and wondering air.

"Who is it?" he repeated.

"You thought me abed, but I have been a witness to the whole villany."

"Abed—abed!" he rejoined, vacantly. "But I never saw you before."

I menaced him again with the weapon. "No more of this! And now, you villain!" I thundered, "only one thing will save you from the gallows you have richly merited; that is my intervention, contingent upon your public confession, as I direct; nor, if you refuse, shall you know mercy or mitigation!"

His eyes protruded from their sockets, and his hands went up over his head as high as his fat arms could lift them. "Lord deliver us!" he gasped. "'Tis Mr. Sudgeberry!"

CHAPTER VII.

MR. SUDGEBERRY AND THE CHERRY RIBBONS.

THE day was coming on broad and clear as the landlord and I went down the road toward the inn, he walking a pace in front at the point of my sword, and limping somewhat, partly from soreness and partly because he grew more and more loath to proceed, while ever and anon he turned a look of pleading over his shoulder.

"But, Mr. Sudgeberry," quoth he, "it was only after—"

Whereupon I would cut him off sharply and threaten him with the cutlass. Thus I drove him on, and I did not forget to improve the time by delivering a severe discourse to him upon the end of the wicked, pointing out the evils of punch-drinking with loose companions, and the pitfalls that besiege the unwary who listen to the counsels of the dissolute.

At first he had been prone to uncontrollable gusts of laughter every time he met my eye, but now he was sobered and plaintive near to the point of tears.

"Oh, that punch!" he exclaimed, shaking his head ruefully. "'Twas it led me into this business. Ah, but surely you don't mean—"

"I don't mean!" I cried. "I don't mean! You will see I mean just what I say. You are going straight with me to Mr. Gray and his daughter, or I hale you before the nearest magistrate on a charge of attempted robbery by force and arms on the King's highway!"

He was red by habit; now he was sickly yellow, and remained so. "Law, law! 'Twas but a hodgepodge of a jest. What harm in the world was in it, Mr. Sudgeberry? Now, why disgrace Mr. Fentriss, and belike ruin me and my house, for this little—"

"Confession or the gallows!" I answered, with so inexorable a mien that he looked even sicklier than before; and there was nothing like laughter left in the man; he could only splutter out feeble explanations and protests, saying over and over, "But we thought you sound asleep, safe abed, sir," as if that completely excused his execrable conduct. I continued to threaten him both with the weapon in my hand and the terrors of the law until, as we approached the inn, his great body seemed too much weight for his knees, and he was but a heap of flesh and sorrow.

"Confession is your only salvation!" I exclaimed, repeatedly. "Otherwise you climb the gallows steps. Hasten! We follow them to Mr. Gray's, instantly."

"Ah, now if you'd but listen," he expostulated. "Mr. Fentriss is your friend; this will destroy him if you proceed with it. Ah, you can't mean to do him such an ill turn!"

"Not another word. We stop only for horses, and ride straight after them."

"There's no need, if you're set on this cruelty," he answered, hanging his head like the shamed man he was. "They are at the tavern. Mr. Fentriss promised beforehand he would persuade them to stop there for breakfast and recuperation. But surely you won't punish us so hard for a jest which we did not mean should include you or be of hurt to anybody; and for my part I was only talked into it after—"

I bade him be silent, and sternly drove him on, my choler mounting higher and higher, not lessened by mental pictures of that arch-hypocrite, William, reinstated with the Grays by this false rescue. I saw him, the deceiver and traitor, receiving the adulation due a hero, and ensconced in shadowy corners with Miss Sylvia during the holidays, whilst I was left to perform the unmerited task of renewing my conversations with the aged father. No! A thousand times no! William Fentriss was in my power, and he should be humbled and exposed for all time.

There was a call from ahead; a horseman had ridden rapidly up, and taking off his hat with a flourish, disclosed to our eyes the features of the ribald O'Donnell. He was mounted on his own horse, his saddle-bags betokening his intention to continue his journey. He hailed the innkeeper with a shout.

"We missed ye, Hoag, and I was coming to look for ye. Saints and martyrs! what black tatterdemalion have ye there?" He squinted his eyes and stared at me, astonished.

"Pay no attention to him or you suffer from my steel," I said savagely to Hoag.

"Be the gods of perdition, 'tis me little man!" cried O'Donnell. "Young Erasmus! No! Yes! No! It is! Driving a quadruplex Bacchus at the point of his sword, and as disfigured as St. Peter's toe! What in the world has happened to ye, me Achilles? And what has Hector done that ye drag him round the walls in ignominy and disgrace?" He seemed utterly taken aback.

"Go your ways, *Captain Blacknight!*" I answered, grimly. "And be glad that you escape the scaffold. This wretch goes

with me to make his confession to the unprotected old man whose carriage you so treacherously assaulted."

"Ha, ha!" shouted the disreputable Irishman. "Is that the tune of it? And so ye weren't abed after all, me little Achilles! Sure I'd like to be stopping to see, for there'll be warm times at the inn, I'm taking me oath! Give me love to Mr. Gray; and, landlord, me reckoning is paid. And—man, do ye want a rescue?"

Hoag only shook his head gloomily, but O'Donnell cried out, "The merriest Christmas in the world to ye both!" and with that, laughing in utter shamelessness, he rode away. I looked to see him stop at the inn to warn Fentriss; but we were now close on; he appeared to think there was not time, so, with a wave of his hand, he clapped heels to his horse's sides and was gone.

Smoke came pouring out of the chimneys of the tavern; ruddy fires shone through the window-panes; and in the stable-yard Mr. Gray's chaise (with most of the varnish knocked off) stood waiting, while the horses were being led to and fro. As we entered the main door I saw that everything had been made bright, clean, and cheery. A smug bar-maid stood ready to curtsy; men-servants bustled in and out, bearing steaming dishes, or ran here and there with fresh logs of firewood; for the knaves had learned their lessons well, and, in spite of the absence of their master, had fled straight from the assault to the inn, where, no doubt, they had greeted the travellers' tale of the attack with innocence and great wonderment. The landlord exhibited an almost violent reluctance to go in, but I overcame his objections with another reference to the law and his own crime: Indeed, having no more fear of him from the moment of his first fright than of a calf, I gave him a poke with my sword, upon which his resistance collapsed utterly, and he passed in-doors in a state of piteous dejection.

At sight of us the bar-maid gave a scream, and covered her face with her apron; a man carrying a great platter of eggs and bacon dropped it to the floor; and two other knaves, variously laden, staggered back in consternation, giving way before us. Without more ado I

stepped to the door of the room in which we had supped the preceding evening, flung it open, urged the trembling Hoag within by prodding him with my point, and stood upon the threshold.

The scene which met our gaze was cozy, appetizing, warmly lit by the fire on the hearth and by the bright horizontal rays of the sun, which now shone red on the windows. The fresh white cloth sparkled with its load of cutlery and china. Never was completer comfort seen, or three cheerier people than those who sat before me.

Mr. Gray was ensconced upon one side of the table, applying himself heartily to a dish of cutlets, while opposite him, neglecting the viands before them, and with chairs whose proximity I instantly marked, sat that false conspirator and Miss Sylvia. The deep blush which suffused her brow as she turned from gazing in his eyes to greet my entrance was near the color of the ribbons she wore, for her becoming travelling cloak was unclasped, and at her throat I caught the flicker of those cherry ribbons, which I still so strangely remember, those cherry ribbons which she flaunted both this winter morning and that other day in June.

As for my feelings at sight of this happy party, I choked with indignation and just wrath to see them all so comfortable, especially the villain who had caused the trouble. He looked as fresh and neat as if he had just risen from an honest slumber on a Sabbath morning, while I, for *his* sins, must needs present a mere wreck to the familiar eye. I own that, for a moment, my rage got so much the better of me that I could but reach out and prod the wretched Hoag again, he being the only thing at hand.

It was a sweet sop to my rage to see the change come over Mr. Fentriss when his glance rose to the disclosure of his Nemesis! The pretended paladin was gazing at Miss Sylvia with all his eyes, as if so hungry for the sight of her he could never leave off looking. Ay, although I saw that attitude for but an instant, it had this in it, and more. A half-tremulous smile was on his lips, the smile of a man who sees coming to him, only a moment or an inch away, the greatest happiness of his life. I arrived no better than just in time.

All three turned toward the door; they stared a moment—as I say, I had suffered mishaps; my attire was hastily arranged in the first place, had suffered grievously, and Hoag's was not much better—then Miss Sylvia rose to her feet with a slight scream; Mr. Gray dropped knife and fork clatteringly upon his plate; and William sprang up with a sharp exclamation. He gave one wretched glance at us, which took in the broken posture of the dilapidated innkeeper, my tattered nightcap, wrathful brow, and the cutlass; and in this stern picture he read his fate. He staggered back against the wall with his hand across his eyes, as if a sudden vertigo had seized him. Then he made one gesture of intense appeal, seemingly begging to be spared the humiliation so justly in store for him; saw the uselessness of it; his arms dropped to his sides; and he stood, with head bent and shoulders bowed, like one already condemned and lost.

I advanced into the room with a solemn tread.

"What is this!" gasped Mr. Gray. "Another robbery?"

"Behold a perfidious monster!" cried I, pointing at William Fentriss across the table. At the sound of my voice, Miss Gray shrieked aloud.

"Heaven defend us!" exclaimed her father. "'Tis that Sudgeberry!"

Miss Gray fell back in her chair and covered her face with her hands.

"Ay, old man," I answered, in a fateful tone; "it *is* I."

"It *is*!" he cried. "What in the name—"

"I am come to defend you, white-haired and credulous old man," I continued, raising my voice; "to defend you from the embraces of a monster, who has played upon your guileless nature and upon that of this innocent maiden, your daughter, even as he played upon his villanous musical instruments last summer. I am here to expose the wiles of a traitor who has caused you to imperil your soul by your profanity, and who, by unheard-of trickery, has sought to reopen the sacred portals of your household, entrance to whose honored precincts a persistent misconduct had so justly forfeited."

Instead of replying directly, the old gentleman looked at me with goggling eyes. He smote the table a blow with his

fist so that the plates jumped and clattered. "Jeremiah and the prophets!" he cried. "It was born in him!"

I hope this tribute was not altogether undeserved, but, without stopping to acknowledge it at the time, I cried, still levelling my finger at the completely confounded Fentriss, "Do you know what this arch-villain, this arch-hypocrite, perpetrated upon you during the watches of the night?"

"Yes, sir," replied the old gentleman, warmly; "I do know what this gallant, this heroic youth has done for us!"

"Nay," quoth I.

"He saved our lives and purses by rescuing us from the largest and bloodiest band of brigands that ever took the road. Know what he did for us!"

"Nay," quoth I.

"Nay!" echoed Miss Sylvia. "Not only that, either, for they are the bravest whose chivalry is most delicate—if he must hear me praise him this once; I shall not spoil him so hereafter! But the truth must be known at home, where none understood his careful thought to save a lady's name from mention in a wild company, not even I, until he told me, ten minutes ago. 'Tis time you should know it too. When they called on him to toast a lady at the supper in town, last August, there was only one he would give, he says—if she could only believe him!" (Her eyes sparkled here exceedingly, and she flushed deeper.) "Yet he was unwilling to pronounce her name in an assembly where some were in wine, so he took for a name the color of the ribbons she was wont to wear, and toasted 'Cherry.' Well, that was a trifle that made a stir and took a long time to explain! And he waited to save our lives before he *would* explain it. Pride is a hateful thing!"

"Nay!" quoth I.

"What, what!" rejoined Mr. Gray. "Why, sir, there were droves of 'em, and single-handed he engaged them in the noblest battle ever fought, and, what is more, he beat 'em off, like the lion that he is!"

"Nay!" I cried. "This only shows how completely you are his dupe, and how dangerously you are deceived in him. Look at him!"

"I pointed to Fentriss, who now turned

helplessly away from every glance with downcast head, his face struck white with pallor.

"Thou hypocrite!" I exclaimed, addressing myself to him. "Thou hypocrite! Tremble, for thy baseness is discovered and thy folly proven. Know, to thy discomfiture, that the landlord hath confessed his own villany, to which thy wickedness persuaded him, and stands here ready to tell the tale to this trusting old man and his daughter. Tremble before their righteous wrath, and prostrate thyself before mine. Scorn is all we have for thee; contempt is all thy portion!" I concluded, with force and majesty.

"Heaven save us!" said old Mr. Gray, impatiently. "What is all this folde-rol?"

Miss Sylvia had turned to William, fixing her eyes upon him with a startled look, yet one which remained steadfastly upon him, nor did she take more than a sidelong cognizance of me, but from this moment forth remained unwaveringly observant of William. He realized that earnest regard of hers, I think, though he dared not meet it, but stood almost with his back to her, his head sinking lower and lower, and his fingers wandering aimlessly amongst his ruffles. His pallor was now matched by hers.

There was a silence; then she spoke in a low voice, tremulous but clear. "What is your accusation, Mr. Sudgeberry, if you please?"

"For Heaven's sake, what would you be at, man?" cried old Mr. Gray, impatiently. "Out with it."

I began with a few brief remarks on the nature of deception and its growth and fruits in the human soul—whereat old Mr. Gray, not having recovered from the shaking-up of his nerves, waxed very impolite, and William Fentriss, with a stifled groan, cried out, "For God's sake, man, say it and have done!" I then proceeded to go over the events of the night, exposing in its entirety the perfidious plot by which we had suffered so much, and I was corroborated in each detail by the landlord, who spoke with extreme reluctance, groaning and apologizing to Fentriss with every word.

At one point Mr. Gray broke out, almost in a scream. "Not a real attack!" he vociferated. "No genuine battle!

You are mad, Sudgeberry, mad as the worst in Bedlam! Why, man, the sword-play was like a dozen blacksmiths hammering upon four anvils apiece; and as for the fring—"

"Tell him," I bade the landlord, sternly, "tell him whether it was, or was not, a feigned attack, all planned to harry, and perhaps injure, this gentleman and lady, in order that your accomplice there might gain their favor by the postures of a hero."

"No, no," protested Hoag. "There was no chance any one should be injured or hurt; and as for Mr. Fentriss, why, it was a wild thing to do, I admit, but every one who knows him or his reputation knows very well that where the danger is real, he is there to confront it twice as soon as—"

"Answer the question and no more! Was the attack feigned, and was it planned by Mr. Fentriss?"

"No more by him than by Mr. O'Donnell, now. Nay, I think Mr. O'Donnell did more—"

"Was it a feigned attack?" I interrupted, wrathfully. "If it was real and genuine, then you were taken red-handed, and it is a case for the law—and you may know the end of that for you. Answer the question!"

"But the sword-play—" Mr. Gray began.

"Undeceive this trusting man!" I commanded.

"Well, then," said Hoag, with a piteous glance at William, "I—I—it was only a jest—we no more than made a noise, once we had the chaise stopped, and—and—"

"Go on, sir!"

"As for the sword-play, it was just two up and two down, and the shooting was in the air—"

"Enough!" I exclaimed. "And now, thou discovered reprobate"—I addressed myself in conclusion to Fentriss—"thy perfidy is known to all. Go! Hide thy head in some obscure place where repentance may avail thee. Go in shame and discomfiture, and presume not to return where the eyes of this old man, his daughter, or myself, shall again behold thy deceptions, or our ears be assailed with thy lies. Go!"

There was silence. Mr. Gray, dazed, with purple face, had sunk into a chair,

breathing hard. The landlord was staring at the floor with an uneasy hang-dog look. I stood with folded arms. Miss Gray, still looking steadily at my defeated rival, spoke again in the same low, clear, tremulous voice.

"Is it true, Will?" she said.

For once the fellow's impudence had utterly deserted him. His chin sunk in the lace at his throat, and his pallor had given way to the fiery blush of shame; his hand trembled at his side. A discovered trickster has ten times the anguish of a detected criminal, and the hopelessness of this one's attitude bespoke a pain which was his fit punishment for all he had done.

"Yes," he said, brokenly, after a long pause.

"Why have you done it?" she asked.

He turned toward her, and, without speaking or raising his eyes, lifted his hand in a slight, uncertain gesture, and let it fall.

"Ah!" she said, apparently as certain of his meaning as if he had spoken. "You dare to tell me you did this for me! You chanced killing the horse-boys, and you ruined my father's chaise, as well as his chances of salvation—according to Mr. Sudgeberry's testimony. You risked frightening me to death, and nearly did it. Look what you have left of Mr. Sudgeberry! Behold the condition to which you have brought your confederate, the landlord! As for yourself, you chanced what has happened to you—detection and disgrace. Now, Mr. Fentriss, do you dare to ask me," she cried, raising her voice—"do you dare ask me to believe that you have done these shameful things for me?"

He tried to speak but could not; he only lifted his hand again and dropped it to his side.

"You must tell me better than that," said she.

He lifted his head and met her eyes humbly, wretchedly. For once not an ounce of jauntiness was left in him, every vestige of his gay bearing was gone. My vigilance had brought him, at last, to the utter humiliation he deserved, and it was a spectacle wherein I read some pleasurable things for myself, as well as a warning example to the frivolous.

"Yes," he said, doggedly. "I would

have done more than that—and shall, if I get the chance!"

"What!" cries she. "Then you must just have me! A man who would do all that for a kind word from me deserves ten thousand of them from ten thousand times a finer creature than ever I shall be! But, since you want *me* . . ."

At this I thought my eyes gone wrong, reproducing a distorted and unreal vision, for the cherry ribbons lay on William's shoulder. But *mine* orbs of vision were not distraught, and the most astonishing event of my life happened, for the lady flung herself into William's arms.

With that the landlord gives a whoop and bolts from the room. I sat me down in a chair beside Mr. Gray. He seemed quite helpless, though he was able to make a feeble spluttering with his lips, which I heard as one hears a sound in a dream. Miss Gray and William appeared to take no note of us.

"Nay," she said to him, "I was harsh to both of us, mayhap—a little; but you must not think it was because I cared about your toasting 'Cherry.' That is nothing but nonsense. Also, it came over me suddenly, one day this autumn, that perhaps you did mean me and the ribbons, after all."

I pondered upon her words. She said he must have her because he had done so much to get her. Now I had lost my sleep; I had spent half the night crawling on hands and knees through the cold snow, falling into ditches and nigh drowning; devastating every garment on sharp hedges; lying on the ground till what clothes I had left were hideous to see; being shot at as a hippopotamus, and later fired into at close range and my nightcap burned full of holes, the upper parts of my hair and face blackened as a negro's by discharges at close range; I had been choked and gagged by an inn-keeper; Heaven knows what I had not borne for her that night—all for her—and yet she said William Fentriss had done so much to get her!

As I have said, there are some questions on which the final dictum can only be, "I do not understand." I came to this conclusion in the present instance. The whole affair was so incomprehensible as to cause a sort of dizziness in me.



MISS SYLVIA ROSE WITH A SLIGHT SCREAM